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BRAVE HEART AND TRUE.

London. Sept. 8/90.

This is to testify that
Mr Geo Lovell's edition
of my novel
Wessex Head & true
is the only one
published in the
United States with
my sanction & the
only one from the
sale of which I
derive any profit.
Florence Carrut

Lovell's International Series, No. 135.

BRAVE HEART AND TRUE.

A NOVEL.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "MY SISTER THE ACTRESS,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

F. M. C. L. C. A. D.

" 'The best hearts, Trim, are ever the bravest,' replied my
Uncle Toby."—STERNE.

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BRAVE HEART AND TRUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE VILLAGE DOCTOR.

LEWIS VANGEL is riding homewards, slowly and thoughtfully, at the close of a warm day in June. The dusk has scarcely fallen, but the peace and silence of approaching night have already descended upon nature, and the surrounding objects are seen through a veil of misty blue. The wild roses and the bindweed in the hedges have closed their leaves, and the birds have hushed their melody. Now and then a big bumble-bee, laden with the day's spoils, flies across his path, or a night-moth flaps its snowy wings against his face, but he is hardly conscious that they do so. He sits, in a slouching, careless attitude, on the back of his gray cob, with his eyes fixed upon space, wrapt in thought. Lewis Vangel is a very remarkable young man for the present century—a century of scepticism, irreverence, and immorality. He is the parish doctor of Withyslea—at least everybody calls him Doctor Vangel, though he has no real right to the title, never having had either the time or the money to take out his diploma of medicine. His story is common, his position humble, only his soul is greater and nobler than that of *other men*. *He does not hate his work ; it is not in his loving, simple nature to hate anything or anybody, still it*

is not congenial to him, and yet he is bound to it. Four years ago he was walking the hospitals in London, and thinking about changing a profession which he found uncongenial to his taste, when his father's sudden death threw his mother and sister Anna unexpectedly upon him for their support. There was no chance of changing then. All he could do was to pass his final examinations as quickly as possible, and take the first work that was offered to him. Anna was a brave girl, energetic, and high-couraged as himself, and refused for a moment to live upon her brother's labor. Through the influence of an old friend of their father, the orphans were quickly provided for, Anna becoming a nurse in a London hospital, and Lewis the parish drudge of Withyslea. He would have resented the epithet himself, but drudgery is the only term for the duties he had to perform in a circuit of thirty miles, for the miserable remuneration of a tumble-down cottage, with a dispensary attached to it, and a hundred and twenty pounds a year. It was all the harder to bear, also, since his father had been a wealthy man, and his family were used to every luxury, until he speculated with his fortune, and died from the shock of losing it. But Lewis never breathes a word of complaint, and if Mrs. Vangel does, he soothes her by every means in his power. He is the very best of sons to his widowed mother—too good, almost, for his unselfishness makes her exacting, and apt to take as a right what she should be only grateful for. But he has an inexhaustible store of comfort in himself, and his thoughts about the world and everything he sees in it. Who can say where they are wandering on this particular evening, as he rides back, dusty and tired, to his mother's side? He has come from attending a painful surgical case in a village seven miles from Withyslea. A farm laborer has fallen on his scythe, and *nearly severed his leg from his body.* Lewis is both clever and skilful for his age, and the country people have the

greatest faith in him, but it has been a terrible business, and he feels sick and weary after it. He is wondering now why the Creator of the universe permits such pain and distress ; why He scatters misfortune with such a lavish hand amongst His poor, suffering, patient, helpless creatures. The vicar of Withyslea, and half-a-dozen other small parishes, the Reverend Andrew Crosbie (who is one of those parsons who reconcile it to their consciences to take Protestant wages whilst they are Romanists in everything but name), would tell him that such things are permitted for the present purification and ultimate glorification of the human species. But Lewis does not believe in parsons, unless they bring common-sense to back their arguments, and his own common-sense, not to say his exalted ideas of the Almighty, forbid his credence in a doctrine of blood and torture, only fit for a race of savages. For he has lived among these people now, night and day, for four years past, and he knows how submissively they endure poverty and sickness, and a life of toil, stretching out to feeble old age, and never murmur, nor ask why it has been ordained so.

If he began by disliking his profession because it sickened him to inflict pain on his fellow-creatures, he thinks too much now of the relief he can give, and too little of the discomfort he experiences, to relinquish it at any price. He has grown to love Withyslea, too—to regard its flowery lanes and fertile fields as things that belong in some measure to himself, and its inhabitants as dear and valued friends. He might not feel so were he more like the ordinary young man of the nineteenth century ; but he is widely different, both in thought and action. Neither circumstances nor education have made him what he is. He was *born* good. He has never indulged in impure thoughts or feelings, and he shrinks from every phase of coarseness, because his refined and sensitive nature can find no pleasure in such things. I do

not mean by this that Lewis Vangel is a purist or an effete. He is a healthy and vigorous man, and the temptations that assail all men have not passed him by ; but he has never dallied with them nor courted them, nor made them for himself. Neither is he given to discussing such subjects with others. His Teutonic origin (as evidenced by his name) has endowed him with a certain reserve and dignity of manner which suits the gravity of his calling, and makes him seem older than he is. He never speaks without consideration, and is therefore never compelled to lower himself by retracting hot and hasty speeches. This makes the ignorant vote Lewis Vangel cold. Never was a greater mistake. His calm exterior hides a wealth of love and tenderness. His affections lie too deep for utterance. Even to his mother and sister (for whom he would make any sacrifice) he is not in the habit of using impetuous words and caresses, but lets his deeds speak for him instead. But then, as yet, Lewis Vangel has never been in love. Passing fancies he has naturally conceived, but they have not gone beyond admiration for a pretty face or a taking manner, and he never mentions the probability of his marriage, even in the distant future. In truth, he is too poor to think of it. How can any man who has a mother to keep on a hundred and twenty pounds a year dream of a wife ? He may suffer and he may sin, but he must not marry. Society has said so ; society, with her festered body and her tainted garments, has raised up a barrier that defies our natural instincts, and renders our lives miserable, for the sake of outward show ! How wicked the unwritten law that fetters a young man's natural inclinations, and drives him to that which he abhors, because the world says he must not sink beneath the position to which he has been born ! Lewis looks enviously sometimes at the cotters' wives, *with their new-born babies* by their sides, and wonders *why he too may not live a natural life in a cottage, and go*

forth to his daily toil and find his reward in the joys of a dual existence. But it is impossible. He has his mother to think of. So long as she lives, he must remain single. And, to remain single, means with Lewis Vangel to live a virtuous life. He has an immense veneration for women. He actually believes in them—in their innocence, their purity, their goodness. The name of “wife” is sacred to him. It means something to be hallowed—kept unpolluted, almost adored. And if he should ever be so happy as to possess a wife, he will bring her no stained record of a youth spent in low and vicious gratification, but a heart and spirit almost as pure as her own. Am I not right to call him a remarkable young man, to live in this age of faithless husbands, youthful debauchees, and lying boasters of favors that have never been bestowed? But he has seen so much more of the sin and suffering of this world than most men of eight-and-twenty. This insight renders some medical students reckless and dissipated. It has made Lewis Vangel thoughtful and introspective. As he draws nearer home, and passes the large and handsome grounds surrounding the Manor House, which is the property of Mr. Moriatty, the most influential resident in Withyslea, Lewis pulls himself together a bit, and, sitting upright in his saddle, makes his little cob move on more briskly. It is nearly nine o'clock. His mother will be looking out for his return to supper. But as he rides past the iron gates of the Manor House drive, he catches sight of a female figure, with a white shawl thrown over her head, standing just within them.

“Is that you, Doctor Vangel?” she exclaims. “Where have you been at this time of night?”

Lewis pulls up at once.

“Good-evening, Mrs. Moriatty. I have just come from Eastweir. One of Mr. Crowe’s men fell on his scythe and divided *one of the arteries* of the leg. He nearly bled to death before I got there.”

"How shocking. Is he all right now?"

"He is doing well, but I wish I had him nearer. Now, if we only had that long-talked-of cottage hospital; this is just the sort of case to benefit by it."

"Ah! that reminds me. I'm afraid we shall have to put off the hospital bazaar for a few weeks, Doctor Vangel, for May won't be here to help us. She is going away."

"Miss Moriaty going away!" exclaims Lewis, evidently taken off his guard.

"Yes, to London, and as soon as ever I can get her things ready. Her aunt, Lady O'More, is spending the season there, and has invited May to join her. It is such a chance for the dear child, we hadn't the heart to refuse, and she is half off her head with delight."

"I suppose so. It will be a great change for her. She must find Withyslea very dull," replies Lewis, in a low voice.

"Oh, terribly! What girl wouldn't? But come in, Doctor Vangel, and have supper with us. It's on the table, and Mr. Moriaty will be charmed to see you. May has a few friends in to-night, too, just to have a word before parting."

At first he hesitates, glancing at his dusty and rough habiliments.

"I think not, Mrs. Moriaty, thank you. I am not presentable, and my mother will be expecting me."

"Nonsense! I will take no excuse. Mrs. Vangel will think you are detained at Eastweir. It's no party, only the Taylors and the Newham girls, and they were making such a noise, I came out here to avoid it. Besides, Mr. Moriaty wants to consult you about his cough. It has come on again, as if it were March instead of June."

"In that case, I am bound to obey you," says Lewis *laughing, as he dismounts and lays his hand upon the bridle rein,*

Mrs. Moriatty opens the gate, and they walk up the drive together. She is a tall, majestic-looking woman, and at first sight Lewis Vangel appears almost small by her side. But that is only because he is so slight. He has a figure of average height—graceful, and fairly muscular, with a pair of good shoulders, which he carries well. His features are handsome, but not striking. You have to look into his face to see the beauty of his dark-blue eyes, fringed with black lashes, and surmounted by well-marked brows—of his clean-shorn mouth, with its sensitive, passionate lips, which are yet firmly closed upon each other. His brown hair is already touched here and there with gray, and, owing to his nervous temperament, his color comes and goes in sudden flashes, that oftener leave him pale than not. On the whole, perhaps, he is more interesting in his appearance than handsome, but his is a face which, once known and loved, is loved forever.

As he passes the stables, he delivers over his patient horse to a groom, and Mrs. Moriatty orders the man to put the animal up and give him a feed, as the doctor will not require him for an hour or more.

Lewis smiles to himself as he hears her say so. It is pleasant to be taken prisoner by force in this way, and compelled to enjoy himself. The poor young fellow is both weary and hungry, and looks forward to the hospitable Manor-House supper table with anticipation. It is not the first time by many that he has tested its capabilities, for the Moriatts have been amongst his most intimate friends ever since his arrival in Withyslea. Mr. Moriatty was a brewer on a large scale, but has long since retired from business, and, from the style in which he keeps up his present establishment, it is a generally accepted fact in the village that his only child, Mary Moriatty (*or May, as she is generally called*), will be a great heiress. *But there is nothing* purse-proud or condescending in

father, mother or child on this account. They mix amongst their poorer neighbors in the most familiar manner, and are always ready to share their good things with others. The young doctor is an especial favorite with Mrs. Moriatty, though she has never said so openly. But she knows how good he is, and both she and her husband have encouraged him to come freely to the Manor-House and make himself at home there. But Lewis Vangel is not the sort of man to take advantage of such an offer. He is far too proud and too shy. He would be afraid of his intimacy being misconstrued into a desire to wheedle himself into the good graces of a man so much richer than he is. For all rich men wield a power unknown to genius or to worth. Do not the silver and nitrate kings of to-day teach us that gold is omnipotent, and art and talent and good birth are nowhere beside it? When Lewis Vangel is rid of his horse, Mrs. Moriatty slips her hand through his arm, and begins to confide in him.

"I am glad Mary is to see something of the London season, of course, but it is rather galling to me to send her as visitor to a house where I have never been admitted myself."

"Is that the case, Mrs. Moriatty?"

"It is indeed. Lady O'More never forgave her brother for marrying a Protestant, nor for being so lax as to allow his daughter to be brought up in the Protestant faith, so we have not met. But I think it would be wrong to refuse her kind offices for May."

"I should have taken a house in town for the season, and introduced Miss Moriatty myself, had I been in your position," says Lewis, with the gravity of fifty.

"So I should have done, Doctor Vangel, if my husband would have allowed me. But he hates London, and refuses to set his foot in it again. So what can I do?"

"*Just what you have done; you always do right,*"
replies Lewis.

"But I hope Lady O'More will not try to convert my girl to Romanism."

"Is there any chance of it? Surely Miss Moriatty has too much good sense."

"I don't know. Girls are very silly and undecided, and she will be thrown a great deal with her cousin, I suppose."

"A young lady?"

"No, a gentleman, Mr. Denis O'More, and, I hear, quite a man about town. But his mother thinks all the world of him."

"Mothers generally do."

"But I wish I felt quite sure about him. Ah! Doctor Vangel, *you* are the sort of young man I would trust a daughter of mine with anywhere."

He laughed in a constrained manner.

"Don't be too sure, Mrs. Moriatty. I may be a wolf in sheep's clothing."

"Nothing of the sort. You're the very best fellow I ever met. I often say I wish I had a son like you."

"You do me too much honor," says Lewis, as they step within the portico of the Manor House.

As they cross the threshold, they are confronted by the master of the establishment, a bluff, red-faced, good-tempered looking man.

"Hullo!" he says to his wife, "I was just coming to see after you. I thought you were lost. Who's this? Vangel?"

"Yes. I saw him passing, and made him come in. I was sure you would be glad to see him."

"Of course, of course; I always am. Come in, my dear boy, and have a chat with me in the smoking-room."

But at this juncture the door of the library, a noble room on the ground floor, is thrown open, and a youthful figure appears upon the threshold.

"Nothing of the sort, papa. If that is Doctor Vangel, I claim him as my prize. Here we are, seven girls, and only one young man between us! You could never have the heart to take number two away!"

"Nonsense, my dear. Doctor Vangel has something better to do than to join in your tomfoolery. It would only worry him."

"Doctor Vangel, I appeal to you. Won't you come and play blind-man's-buff with us? I am going away awfully soon, and it may be the last time I shall ever ask you. Do say yes."

The vivid color has rushed to Lewis's cheeks.

"I will do anything you ask me, Miss Moriarty," he stammered, "provided your father approves of it."

"Then come along. Papa always approves of everything I like, and it only wants half-an-hour to supper time."

She pulls him impatiently by the sleeve as she speaks, and he has no alternative but to follow her dictates, whilst her parents laugh and shrug their shoulders, and go on their way together, exclaiming, "Spoilt child!"

CHAPTER II.

LEWIS MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THE young lady who has thus unceremoniously taken possession of Lewis Vangel is a very fair type of early womanhood. Her age is eighteen. She was only a schoolgirl in short frocks when he came to the neighborhood, who used to put out her tongue at him if he ordered her to take any medicine, and run away and hide *herself* when he called to look at her teeth, and was *generally* regarded as an over-indulged and rather un-

pleasant child. But the four years from fourteen to eighteen make as much difference to a blooming girl as a week of sunshine to the trees in spring. You have hardly realised that they are budding, when, hey presto ! they are in leaf. May Moriarty is not yet full grown, but she is a woman. Her tall young figure has assumed all sorts of lovely undulating curves. Her laughing, roguish eyes have a world of meaning in them, and her pouting, parted lips, though rather too yielding in character to denote self-control, form just such a mouth as a man loves to look upon, and longs to kiss. She is very fair, with blue eyes and a white skin, and bright, sunny hair, and is the impersonation of her pet name of May. She seizes the young doctor's hand in the most familiar manner, and draws him eagerly after her into the library. Like many older ladies, she associates the name of her medical attendant with nothing more romantic than pills and potions, and forgets altogether that he is a man with the same feelings and ideas as the rest of his sex.

"Doctor Vangel's going to play with us," she exclaims gleefully, as she rejoins her companions ; "isn't that fun ? Now, Nelly, whose turn is to be blind man ?"

"The doctor's, the doctor's !" cry all the girls, as they press round him with the silken bandage. Lewis finds himself the centre of a group of excited and disorderly Bacchantes. Fair girls and dark girls, and short girls and tall girls, close in upon him on all sides, shouting and laughing, whilst they tie the handkerchief firmly over his eyes. He begins to like it. He was tired and depressed when he entered the Manor House, but he catches the spirit of their youthful enthusiasm, and feels quite eager to join the game.

"You just wait till I catch you," he exclaims to the owners of the fingers that pull his hair and twitch his coat sleeve, and otherwise maltreat him, as soon as he is *unable to detect the defender*, "I'll make you pay for

this, young ladies. You know what the penalty is when a gentleman catches a lady."

"But you shan't catch us—you *can't* catch us," shriek the girls, as they fly all over the room in the most erratic manner, darting across his path, placing themselves almost within the circle of his arms, jeopardizing their safety in the most reckless fashion, and screaming with delight as he passes them by, and stretches out his hands to empty space. At last he catches some one—a great stout girl, shaped like twenty farmer's daughters in the parish, and mistakes her identity. It is Annie Taylor, and he thinks it is Nellie Newham. A chorus of contemptuous epithets is showered upon him for the blunder, and incites him on to retrieve his error. He stands still for a few seconds, and lures his quarry on to feats of greater daring. Then, when they have reached the very height of imprudence, and are pulling his ears and his nose, and slapping his hands, he makes a sudden lunge and captures the ringleader. An awful hush immediately pervades the room. The girls scarcely breathe as Lewis's fingers commence to trace the outline of his prisoner's features, in order to determine her name. He has caught her in such a manner that she is fast held in his arms. He can feel the form of her rounded bosom as it rises and falls against his own. Her breath plays on his face. He knows that her lips are close to his. A sudden emotion seizes him. He feels that he can go no further. His arms drop to his side, as he says, in an altered voice,—

"It is Miss Moriaty!" and pulls the bandage from his eyes.

"But how could you tell? How did you guess? You never touched her," exclaimed the other girls, as they crowded round him.

"I don't know, but you see I am right," replies Lewis Vangel.

May still stands before him, but with a new concern

pictured in her face. She had noted the change in his demeanor.

"Doctor, are you not well?" she asks hurriedly.

"Quite well indeed, but a little overtired with my day's work. I have been very busy since the morning."

He has sunk down into the nearest chair, and is looking pale and exhausted.

"And I was so disgustingly selfish as to drag you in here, instead of letting you rest with papa. Doctor Vangel, what do you think of me?"

She kneels down in an impulsive fashion by the side of his chair, and rests one hand upon his knee. Her pretty face, full of a self-reproachful anxiety, is raised to his own.

"Nothing at all, Miss Moriatty! I was delighted to join your game. Let us go on with it."

He attempts to rise and evade her, but she will not permit him to do so.

"No, no; we have had enough, and when you get up again it must be to go in to supper. Run, Nelly, and see if it is ready. I daresay the dear old pater is fuming because we have not yet joined him. We can have another game afterwards, if we think fit, but you shall not attempt it, Doctor, till you have had something to eat and drink."

"Why, *you* are the doctor now, Miss Moriatty, and I am the patient," says Lewis, with a faint smile.

"Of course I am, and a much better doctor than you, any day," she answers brightly. "I cure my patients with roast-beef and Romford ale, instead of nasty black draughts and pills. Acknowledge they are much nicer to take, at the least."

"Indeed I will, and sometimes much more efficacious! And so you are going to London, Miss Moriatty?"

"Yes; *isn't it delightful?*" she says, with a long drawn breath and clasped hands. "I am so happy—

can't sleep for thinking of it. Fancy going to the opera, and the theatres, and real balls. I think Aunt Kathleen is the dearest thing in all the world to have invited me."

"You are not acquainted with her yet?"

"No, but I love her already for being so kind to me, and I shall love her a thousand times more when I see her. I know I shall."

"And shall you be away long?"

"I *hope* so! I hope we shall get on so well together that Aunt Kathleen will take me abroad with her at the close of the season. She *might* go to Paris. If she does, and without me, I shall just die of disappointment."

"But that would make your visit extend to months, Miss Moriarty?"

"All the better if it does! I'm longing to leave this dull old hole. One might as well be an Egyptian mummy as cooped up in Withyslea."

"You must not talk such treason. Withyslea is one of the loveliest villages in England. When you have endured a few weeks of London smut and smoke, you will be longing to come back to our flowers and sunshine, and fresh, pure air."

"Do you think so? I don't! I'm sick of the old place! I've had enough flowers and fresh air to last me a lifetime. I want to see something of the world now."

"And what will Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty do without you?"

"Papa and mamma? Very well, I should say. They've got each other, and the house and the farm to look after. Besides they could come to London, too, if they chose, but they don't choose. So it's their own fault, you see."

"Yes, I see," responds Lewis with a sigh.

At that moment Mrs. Moriarty throws open the library door. She has plenty of servants to send messages by, *but she prefers to carry them herself.*

"*Now, good people,*" she exclaims, "are you coming

to supper? Papa says he's famished, and I'm sure Doctor Vangel must be. May, you sha'n't tease him any more. You girls never stop to think of all the work he has to do, nor how much we owe him for doing it so well."

"How do you know whether I think of him or not, mamma? At any rate, I'm not worrying him now, am I, Doctor Vangel?"

"You never worry me, Miss Moriaty," he answers, but the wearied expression of his countenance belies his words.

Mrs. Moriaty tucks his arm under her own, in true motherly fashion, and bears him off to the dining-room, leaving the girls to follow with their solitary cavalier, a brother of the Newhams. The supper-table, where Mr. Moriaty awaits them, presents a dazzling array of silver, and an abundance of good cheer. A butler and two footmen are in attendance on the guests, and there is enough provided for fifty instead of fifteen, yet everything is conducted with the utmost simplicity and homeliness. Lewis Vangel, who cares nothing for rich or dainty fare himself, but often longs to be able to stimulate his mother's failing appetite with more enticing food, has not yet grown accustomed to the utter carelessness with which these people regard the fruit of their life's labor. So very little of this daily abundance, he thinks, would make him happy. He is still young enough to believe in the satisfaction of wealth.

"I've had the Vicar round here this afternoon," remarked Mr. Moriaty presently, "on a begging expedition, as usual, for church improvements, as he calls them. His last 'fad' is to have the whole of the outside of the church scraped. He says it's built of red granite, which has been overlaid with stucco. Well, what does he want to pull it down for? The church is well enough. I don't see how it will be bettered by being turned into red granite."

"I shouldn't mind what he did with regard to outside decoration, and so forth," interposes his wife, "if he didn't try to introduce such new-fangled doctrines in the church itself. Mrs. Crosbie tells me he's going to have a confessional built in the side aisle, just like the Romanists, and invite everybody to go to confession once a week. It's ridiculous."

"I don't see anything ridiculous about it," says Mr. Moriarty, who has been reared in the Catholic Church; "it's a good old custom, and keeps people straight. But if Crosbie believes in it, why doesn't he go over to Rome?"

"That's just what I mean, papa," replies the lady. "I wouldn't cast a slur on your religion for all the world, but let a man stick to what he professes. If he's a Protestant, let him be a Protestant, and not introduce a lot of new-fangled ways that the people don't understand. Am I not right, Doctor Vangel?"

"I agree with you entirely, Mrs. Moriarty, and I think Mr. Crosbie will get himself into trouble if he goes much further. The bishop is very strict about such matters, if brought to his notice, and the country people are very conservative, and very ignorant. They don't understand the meaning of half they say or hear, and are apt to resent anything they don't understand. 'That's English, you know.'"

"Well, I should think a confessional would be lovely," cries May, "so solemn and mysterious. To pop your head behind the curtains all in the dark, and then to hear a voice talking to you, without seeing anybody! I should die of laughing."

Lewis smiles at her folly. She seems such a child compared to himself.

"You little goose," says her father, "you wouldn't *think it so funny* if you had anything to confess."

"*Oh, papa, have you ever confessed your sins?*"

"Of course I have, in days gone by. All good Catholics do. Sometimes I wish I had not given up the habit, like many other things my mother taught me."

"Why don't you go and confess to Mr. Crosbie, then?"

"Confess to him!" exclaims Mr. Moriarty indignantly. "Rubbish! You don't know what you're talking about. He has no more right to hear confessions than you have."

"Of course not," chimes in Mrs. Moriarty, "and I hope the bishop will put a stop to it. But don't let us begin a theological discussion, papa. I know Doctor Vangel doesn't care for them."

"I think they are so useless, as well as unnecessary," says Lewis. "Why cannot each one of us serve God in the way which suits us best. My mother is always having discussions with me on the subject. She cannot understand my indifference to church worship. Luckily my duties often take me in the opposite direction, and when they don't, I invent some. I cannot stand Mr. Crosbie's genuflections and intonations. I feel much more devout when out in the woods and fields."

"So do I," exclaimed Miss Moriarty; "and that reminds me, papa, we must have a picnic before I go. Let's have a real good one in Outram Wood. May we?"

"Certainly, dear. Arrange it just as you wish," replies the indulgent parent.

"That's right. Then it shall be on Thursday—the day after to-morrow—and everybody here must come. *You'll* come, won't you, Doctor Vangel?"

Lewis hesitates.

"I am not sure, Miss Moriarty. I cannot promise. I might be prevented. I must not neglect my patients."

A decided shadow falls on May's bright face.

"Oh, bother your patients! Who are they? A lot of old men and women, too blind and deaf to see you or hear you. Give them a sleeping draught all round to

morrow evening, so that they mayn't wake up till Friday."

"You have a short method of disposing of unpleasant duties, Miss Moriaty. Suppose the sleeping draughts were to make them sleep forever?"

"All the better if they did—no! I don't quite mean that, only I shall hate them if they keep you away from my picnic."

"It is very kind of you to say so," he murmurs.

"Well, you must come, then, whoever wants you, and your mother too—that is, if she cares about it. Now you understand, Doctor Vangel? You are not to fail me, even if Mr. Crosbie has a fit in the confessional. "Oh, mother," she continues suddenly, "must I ask those horrid Crosbies?"

"Don't speak of them like that, May. We may not approve of all they do or say, but still they are set over us."

"I am sure *she* isn't, though she tries to be, with her nasty, prying, domineering ways. I can't bear Mrs. Crosbie. Need they come?"

"I think you should ask them, as it is to be the last time you see your friends before leaving Withyslea. Perhaps they will refuse."

"I am sure they won't, just because they're not wanted. Never mind! I shall not go near them all day. Now, mamma, it's to be the very loveliest picnic we have ever had. Tell Nancy about the ducks, and fowls, and pigeons to-night, won't you? They must be killed the first thing in the morning."

"Leave it to me, darling, and everything shall be satisfactorily arranged," replies Mrs. Moriaty, gazing with fond admiration at the speaking face of her daughter.

"Poor little ducks, and fowls, and pigeons!" says *Lewis*, as he rises from table. "It seems hard so many *innocent little lives* should be slaughtered to minister to

the wants of our palates. I often wish we were all vegetarians."

"Everybody knows how fond you are of animals, Doctor Vangel," says Mrs. Moriatty, "but I'm afraid it is inevitable. Are you leaving us so soon?"

"Yes, I must go now. It is past eleven, and I have to be up early to-morrow. Good-night."

He shakes hands with every one present before he comes to Mary Moriatty. As he takes hers, she squeezes his significantly, and repeats,—

"You *will* come, won't you? If you don't, I sha'n't care for the picnic one bit."

Lewis colors in his sensitiveness, and Mr. Moriatty exclaims, "Why, you'll be making him an offer next, you minx," as he hurries away from them, and makes his way to the stables. Even after he has mounted his horse, and is jogging homeward, his cheeks are flaming with excitement, and his heart beats rapidly. What does she mean? What *can* she mean? Had he more experience of women, he would be at no loss to understand the openly-expressed interest of a young girl means simply nothing at all. But Lewis has not yet learnt to look for love in averted glances, a subdued tone, and shrinking manner. Yet even his ignorance might not have led him to ask such a question were not another suspicion knocking at his heart—a suspicion which has never presented itself to him before this evening.

He reaches home in a sort of dream, and, having left his horse in the stable, stumbles up the broken flight of steps that leads to the front door, and, entering the deserted parlor, sinks into a chair by the table, and buries his face in his hands. What is this unwelcome feeling that has come over him? Why should he have shrunk from holding Mary Moriatty in his arms, even in play? In what are his relations towards her altered from what *they have ever been?* He has known this girl for four

long years, long even to eight-and-twenty. He has attended her during that time through various illnesses, seen her in weakness and in health, analyzed her symptoms, and watched her development as he has done with many others, and never thought of her in any other light than that of a patient, and the daughter of Mr. Moriatty. Why should he think any differently now? Why should he have suddenly grown awkward and self-conscious in her presence? Why should the prospect of her leaving Withyslea make him feel so chilled and depressed? Lewis Vangel is angry with himself, but he will also be honest. He recognizes the reason of his discomfiture, and the folly of it, at one and the same moment. He is falling in love with Miss Moriatty! Here he is temporizing a little. He should say "has fallen" instead of "is falling," but he cannot bring himself to believe the extent of his misfortune. He pronounces the disease to be still curable, and, in the same breath, that it shall be cured.

"What a fool! what an idiot! what a madman I have been," he says inwardly, "to let my thoughts rest for a moment upon any woman, and especially a woman like that—the daughter and heiress of Mr. Moriatty. It is *too* funny, too ludicrously preposterous. I could laugh aloud at the picture I should present if any one knew of my insanity. I, Lewis Vangel, in the proud position of village apothecary to Withyslea, with my mother on my hands, and a hundred and twenty pounds a year to keep us both on, and this sumptuous house, crowded with every luxury, to bring a bride home to. Ha! ha! ha! It would be as good as a scene in a play."

But then, suddenly changing his tone and manner, he exclaims, in a voice of pain,—

"Oh, my God! to what a depth has my folly brought me."

Here he springs up, and, pushing his hair off his heated forehead, takes his stand before the fireplace.

"Folly. Yes, that is the right word for it, and folly that shall be stamped down, crushed out—scattered to the four winds of heaven. It is a very good thing she is going away. By the time she returns I shall have conquered myself. Perhaps she may never return. She may marry in London, and settle far from the place she says she hates. Girls with money have never much trouble in finding husbands. The sooner she does so the better for me. But, married or single, I have to cure myself, and *I will.* The thing is impossible, so I must put it out of my head. The wonder is, how it ever got there."

His voice has grown hoarse and husky, and as he finishes speaking he pours out a glass of water and swallows it hurriedly. At this juncture, Mrs. Vangel enters the room. She has heard her son's entrance, and cannot imagine what detains him downstairs. She is clad in a dingy dressing-gown, has a nightcap on her head, and carries a candlestick in her hand. She would present a ludicrous appearance in the eyes of a stranger, but Lewis thinks of nothing but the affectionate anxiety which has brought her there.

"My dear mother, he says, starting a little as she comes upon him, "why on earth have you disturbed yourself? I should have looked in upon you as usual before I turned in."

"My dear boy, I was afraid something was the matter. Were you talking to yourself? I thought you had brought some one in to supper."

Lewis glances at the table, on which stands a tray with some bread and cheese and a jug of beer, and laughs sarcastically.

"That's very likely, isn't it, mother? We have such elegant suppers to ask our friends to."

"Oh, Lewis, my dear, I am sorry. I wish I could provide something better for you after your day's work, but *you know the money won't run to it.*"

"Of course, mother; and I was wrong to speak like that. I am afraid I'm in a bad temper to-night."

"*You* in a bad temper, Lewis? Why, I have never seen you out of temper in your life. I am sure, when you were a baby, you were the sweetest—"

"Yes, yes, mother," he interposes, for he dreads nothing so much as the reminiscences of his infancy, "we know all that, but you see I'm not a baby any longer. But don't concern yourself about my supper, for I have been with the Moriatys, and had everything I could possibly desire."

"I am glad of that; and did they tell you that May is going to London?"

"Yes. How did you hear it?"

"Miss Cassie Prew has been in this afternoon."

"Oh, of course you know everything that's going to happen, then, and everything that isn't going to happen. But let's go to bed, mother. I'm tired."

"Lewis, is anything *wrong*?" asks Mrs. Vangel suddenly. "You look dreadfully pale and haggard. Are you ill?"

"Nonsense. Am I ever ill? What time have I to be ill?"

"Has anything vexed you, then?"

"What an inquisitive old woman you are. I believe you want to rival Mrs. Crosbie. Yes, I am vexed at a dozen things. I am vexed that I'm not a better man, or a richer man—that I'm not a bishop or a prince of the blood royal—especially vexed too, just now, to see you out of bed instead of in it."

"Ah, Lewis, now you are laughing at me."

"Well, what's the good of crying when I have nothing to cry for? You expect impossibilities."

"But you were talking to yourself as I came down-stairs."

"*A bad habit of mine, mother, but occasionally useful.*"

I was running over the symptoms of a patient, and trying to think of a cure."

"Is your patient very ill, Lewis?"

"I hope not. I think he will have sufficient energy to brace himself together and shake off the disease. But I am too tired to think about it any more to-night."

"Good-night, then, my boy."

"Good-night, mother. I shall be as right as a trivet by to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER III.

THE PURE-SOULED CHARLOTTE.

Mrs. CROSBIE is standing at the Vicarage window, picking her teeth with a pin, and peeping at the passers-by from behind the blind. She has manifold duties to occupy her. She is the mistress of a good-sized house, and four or five servants. She has three children in the nursery, and the wants of a large parish to superintend. But she is one of those women who are full of a fussy idleness ; who are always complaining of the amount of work they have to do, and, in reality, do nothing at all, but find fault with other people. She is a purse-proud, domineering, arrogant mortal, who considers it the quintessence of high breeding to assert her position as the Vicar's wife, and keep all smaller fry at a distance. Above all, she is prying and interfering—full of a morbid curiosity concerning the private doings of the rest of the village, and prone to dictate to those over whom she has not the slightest authority. It follows that Mrs. Crosbie is generally disliked in Withyslea, the Vicar being the only person who is blind to her faults. She is a tall, slight woman of about five-and-thirty. Her hair, *eyelashes, and eyebrows are the color of whitey-brown paper.*

Her eyes large, and of a pale blue. Her nose also large, long and white, like the bill of a bird. Her mouth small and screwed up, as if on the eve of objecting to an impropriety. Such is the personal discipline of Mrs. Crosbie. She generally dresses in fawn, or drab, or gray, like a Quakeress, and wears an unfashionable straw bonnet, crossed with white ribbons, and tied meekly under her chin. She is distinctly a lady by birth and in appearance, and some people might call her nice-looking and elegant. The Vicar frequently alludes to her as his "pure-souled Charlotte." He is not quite satisfied that a High Churchman has any right to marry, but, being married, he is quite sure he could not have selected a help more meet for him than the present Mrs. Crosbie. Charlotte is very particular in performing her religious duties. She is never absent from matins, benediction, or evensong. She confesses every Saturday afternoon, and communicates weekly, and is pertinaciously anxious that every one in Withyslea should do the same. Still, she does not consider her idle and impertinent curiosity in the light of a fault, and is irate with any one who refuses to indulge it. Lewis Vangel she has always disliked, and the feeling is reciprocal. In the first place, he refuses to acknowledge her right to rule over the souls and bodies of her husband's parishioners. In the second, he never attends divine service. In the third, he keeps his own counsel, and will not satisfy her curiosity as to the diseases of his patients. He and she are always at secret daggers drawn. He doesn't believe in her virtues, and she doesn't believe in his skill. She orders him about in the most peremptory manner, because she says he is the village apothecary, and bound to obey his Vicar ; but, if anything serious occurs at the vicarage, she quietly insults Lewis by sending to the nearest town for a doctor. So *there is silent war between them, and he always takes his time about obeying a summons from Mrs. Crosbie.* On

the morning in question—the morning after our story opens—she is watching for his arrival, whilst she tries to see over the blinds what the Newhams, who live just opposite, have for dinner. One of her children is feverish, and she sent a note the first thing after breakfast to Doctor Vangel, desiring him to call at once. It is now one o'clock, and he has not yet arrived. What impudence to keep her waiting when she might have had half a hundred other things to do. Just as she is thinking thus Lewis appears, walking slowly and thoughtfully up to the vicarage door.

"Well, Doctor Vangel," is Mrs. Crosbie's salutation. "You seem to have taken your time about answering my note."

"I beg your pardon," says Lewis, depositing his hat upon a chair.

"Didn't you get my letter before you started on your morning rounds?"

"I did, but I had more important cases to attend to. I had to ride over to Eastweir to see a laborer who is dangerously hurt."

"*A laborer!*" repeated the Vicar's wife. "I should have thought my child would have been considered first."

"Did you?" replies Lewis coolly. "Then you thought wrong. I make no difference between my patients, excepting as to their need of me. What is the matter with the children?"

"The baby is very feverish—really quite ill. Nurse was up with him all night. I consider he should have been attended to hours ago."

"It's only his teeth," says the young doctor imperturbably; "and since you won't allow me to lance his gums, there is nothing for it but patience. Shall I go up and look at him?"

"If you please," replies Mrs. Crosbie majestically, as *she precedes him to the nursery*. "The Moriats give a

picnic in Outram Wood to-morrow," she continues, as they go upstairs.

"I know it," he answers briefly.

"*You* are not going surely?" she ejaculates, turning round on him.

"I have not made up my mind yet."

"I should not have thought it required any deliberation. Your services belong to the parish. You may be required for life or death at any moment. I don't see how you can be sure of fulfilling your duty if you absent yourself for an indefinite number of hours, and at such distance as Outram."

Now, Lewis Vangel had almost determined that he would not accept the invitation to the picnic. He had been thinking over it this morning, and his resolution of the night before, and come to the conclusion that it is a case in which the truest wisdom is shown by flight. But the remark of the Vicar's wife is so arrogantly pertinent, that his pride is in arms at once.

"Is the Vicar going?" he asks her.

"I think so. We have accepted Mrs. Moriarty's invitation. I know of nothing to prevent us, if the day is fine."

"And yet Mr. Crosbie's services belong to the parish much as mine, and may be required (as you say) for life or death at any moment."

"Oh, Doctor Vangel, do you really mean to compare yourself with the Vicar?"

"No. The work bears no comparison. One is that what you call 'the perishable body,' the other for 'the immortal soul.' You don't need me to tell you which is considered the most precious of the two, Mrs. Crosbie. And now, perhaps, we had better pay our visit to the baby."

The Vicar's wife tosses her head. She feels she has the worst of it always with Lewis Vangel. "And so you are going, I suppose?" she said acridly.

"Yes, if nothing prevents me, I am going," he replied.

but he does not add that she has been the cause of his decision. As he enters the nursery, the elder children shout and cling to his legs, and the teething baby smiles in his face. All children and all animals love Lewis Vangel. He bears the certificate of their welcome in his benevolent countenance. There is nothing to be done for the present little sufferer but to alleviate the feverish symptoms caused by the pain, and caution the nurse against improper diet. Any mother could have done as much for the child herself, but Mrs. Crosbie loves to wield her supposed power by giving the doctor as much trouble as possible. As he wishes her good-day, she lets drive another arrow at him.

"I regret we do not see you oftener in church, Doctor Vangel."

"Do you? Don't take any trouble on my account, Mrs. Crosbie. My time does not go a-begging, I can assure you."

"But surely you could spare a few moments in the interest of your soul. Early matins, for instance. You would find them such a blessing."

"Not unless they could be brought to my bedside, I am afraid. You forget how late I generally am."

"Ah, I fear it is of little use trying to turn your thoughts to better things. By the way, Doctor," continues Mrs. Crosbie, the ruling passion suddenly coming uppermost, what *is* the matter with Maria Turner? Her mother obstinately refuses to tell me."

"Maria Turner? She is out of health," replies Lewis evasively.

"Of course I know *that*! Any one with half an eye can see the girl's ill! But *what* makes her ill, and why are they so mysterious about it?"

"Well you see, Mrs. Crosbie, if Mrs. Turner wishes it kept a *secret*, you can hardly expect *me* to divulge it."

"But you forget who I am, Doctor Vangel! Surely

the Vicar's wife has a right to have her questions on such a subject answered."

"I can't say I recognize the right. If I did, I should yield to it. But Mrs. Turner (though only a cottager's wife) has an unalienable right to keep her family secrets if she chooses, and so I am bound to respect her wishes."

"You set *her*—a woman whose husband earns eighteen shillings a week—before *me*?"

"No, not before you. Only (in such an instance as this) upon equal terms."

"Very well, Doctor Vangel! I shall not forget your definition, you may be sure of that. Good-morning," and in high dudgeon, Mrs. Crosbie turns from him to re-enter the sitting-room. Here she finds her husband's curate, Mr. Somerset, a good-looking young fellow, with his head dished up in a Roman collar, and his long body buttoned into a black cassock.

"I never saw such an impertinent man as that doctor in my life," she exclaims indignantly. "Fancy his refusing to answer me a simple question about one of my own parishioners. Why, I have a right to know! How can I help them if I am to be kept in the dark as to their affairs? And then to tell me I am no better than a common laborer's wife!"

"Surely he never said *that*, Mrs. Crosbie."

"Something very much like it, but I'll be even with him yet. I'll get him turned out of the parish if he doesn't take care. That young man has been my aversion ever since he entered it. I never met such an independent, out-spoken person before. And he's much too young for the position. It's ridiculous that a man of that age should be allowed to go about and visit all the sick girls in the village, and then refuse to tell *me*, the wife of the Vicar and mother of a family, anything about it. It's worse *than ridiculous*—it's indecent."

"*Don't let it upset you. It is not worth it,*" says the

curate soothingly, as he approaches her side. "Think of how much depends on you—the harmony of our blessed services, the decoration of our temple, the well-being of your good husband, and (may I add) my unworthy self."

"Ah! *you* know how to appreciate me, Mr. Somerset. You can understand and sympathize with what I feel," replies the "pure-souled Charlotte," with downcast, dove-like eyes.

"I can indeed," says the curate, gently touching her long, limp hand. "We must all suffer, but we both know where to go for consolation. Is not that the luncheon bell?"

Such people as are always trying to make fun out of serious things might think that the question follows appropriately upon the assertion, but any way the sound seems to cheer both their spirits as they walk smilingly into the dining-room.

The Reverend Andrew Crosbie's benefice including several out-lying hamlets, he is obliged to keep two curates to share his ministerial duties. One of them, Mr. Longton, who is old and gray, resides at Eastweir; but the Reverend Charles Somerset, fresh from Oxford and crammed to the brim with Tractarianism, is kept at Withyslea Vicarage to assist at the daily services. The "pure-souled Charlotte" made herself very ridiculous on his first arrival by rapturizing over his "sublime look" whilst reading the prayers, the "wonderful music" of his intonation, and the "inspired glance" with which he pronounced the benediction, but since no one would go into rhapsodies with her, she has contented herself with a pious flirtation with him whilst sharing their parochial duties. The Vicar views the intimacy between his wife and his curate without any alarm. He is a far better man than she is a woman, and would not even suspect her of evil. *If any result is to accrue from the quasi-sentimental*

friendship between them, it will show itself in the wonderful influence for good on the soul of the long-legged curate. When Mrs Crosbie joins her husband at the luncheon-table, and informs him of the projected picnic, he begs her to excuse his attendance, and take Somerset as her cavalier instead.

"One of us must stay at home, love," he says, "to conduct vespers, and I have one or two important theories to commit to paper for future use. And Somerset is younger than I am, and will enjoy a picnic more, and take, I am assured, the utmost care of my precious Charlotte for me."

"Of that you may be certain, sir."

Mrs. Crosbie rises from table, and, crossing the room, twines her arms fondly around the Vicar's neck.

"But cannot you come with us until it is time to return for vespers?" she says coaxingly; "we start at ten. Do, Andrew. What will the pleasure be to me without you?"

"No, love, do not tempt me. It is absolutely necessary that I should devote some hours to literary work, and a free day is a boon to me."

"Oh, you naughty man. You want to get rid of your poor Charlotte."

"Don't say such a thing, my dear, even in jest. You really pain me. But duty must come first of all. I need not say that to one who never neglects a single duty of life. It is glorious weather, and I hope you will have a pleasant day. Who are to be there?"

"Everybody in Withyslea, I believe. Mrs. Moriaty wants to make it a farewell party before Mary leaves us."

"A great mistake, in my opinion, to send the girl away. London gayeties will only make her discontented with the quiet of Withyslea. An heiress, too. She is almost sure to be stolen from her parents altogether. Their *object should* have been to get her a husband nearer *home*. *She would* have been the wife for you, Somerset.

A pretty girl, well brought up, and innocent as a baby." At this remark the curate blushes deeply, and Mrs. Crosbie looks annoyed.

"Mary Moriatty!" she exclaims. I hope, if Mr. Somerset ever marries, he will choose a more dignified wife than *she* will make. Why, she's a regular hoyden."

"But, indeed, I have no intention of marrying whatever. Such a thing has never entered my mind," stammers the curate.

"Ah, your doctrines are even stricter than my own, I know," rejoins the Vicar. "If a man can be happy whilst living a single life, well and good. But I cannot say myself, being married, that I see the great snare of the holy state. Still, it is not every priest who is blessed with such a partner as my Charlotte."

"No, indeed," murmured Mr. Somerset.

"And so it becomes impossible to determine for others. But Mary Moriatty is a sweet girl, a very sweet girl."

"You judge her from a man's point of view," says Charlotte sharply.

"No, my dear, excuse me, from a Priest's."

"She never comes to confession, though, and very seldom to communion."

"That is her mother's fault more than her own. The father, having had the misfortune to be reared under the supremacy of the Papal See, has created a bias in his wife's mind against the Anglican Church; but I hope to see that remedied before long. We have had several interesting conversations on the subject lately."

"Mrs. Moriatty is a very obstinate woman, and I think you will find her difficult to convince. She refuses to see any distinction between the Anglican and Roman Churches."

"Ah, well, my love; prayer and perseverance! Perseverance and prayer! That is the only road to success," *replies the Vicar, as he rises from the table and breaks up the conference.*

On the following morning, the road to Outram Wood is lined with a party of pleasure-seekers, mounted on and in every sort of conveyance. The farmers' sons and daughters are rattling along on their rough ponies. The Vicar's wife is driven in a basket-carriage by Mr. Somerset. The givers of the entertainment are packed in an open landau. Several young men and women are on horseback ; the elder people jog in tax-carts, or T-carts, or old-fashioned phaetons, which they purchased when they were married. Last of all, and at some distance behind the rest, comes Lewis Vangel, on his gray cob. He has not yet made up his mind whether he is a fool or not for joining the picnic-party. He feels terribly shy of meeting Miss Moriarty again, terribly afraid of himself, and a little angry into the bargain ; and yet he does not think that, under any circumstances, he could have had the courage to stay away. Her last day amongst them, too, and when she leaves them it may be forever. Why should he not indulge himself with a few more hours of her company, even if it makes the subsequent loss more hard to bear ? Besides, did she not say to him, the very last thing, in that sweet voice of hers, that if he were not there she should not care for the picnic one bit ? The remembrance puts new life into him. He spurs on his horse, and changes his jog-trot into a merry canter. He passes Mrs. Crosbie's basket-carriage, and takes off his hat to her with a triumphant smile. Next he reins up his steed alongside the Moriarty's landau, and bids them "Good-morning."

"Oh, Doctor Vangel," cries May, "I am so glad you have managed to come. Now I've got all I want. I wish we had known it before. You should have driven with us in the landau, instead of riding along this dusty road, and then you could have sat by me all the way."

She is looking lovely (or he thinks so, which amounts to the same thing), in a white cambric frock, with a broad-brimmed leghorn hat sheltering her sunny eyes,

and she smiles upon him as if he were her dearest friend.

"Nothing would have pleased me better, Miss Moriatty," he answered, "but, under any circumstances, I must have brought my horse, in case I am fetched away before the feast is over."

"But you *sha'n't* be fetched away. I won't allow it," she cries, with a pretty imperiousness. "Who is to fetch you?"

"I have left word with Jem Stammers that, if any emergency arises, he is to follow me on one of the farm horses."

"Why couldn't he go in such a case for old Doctor Burrows at Hayden? Mamma, I won't have Doctor Vangel's day spoiled. If you see Jem Stammers anywhere, send him about his business."

Lewis laughs lightly. It is so pleasant to be taken an interest in by a pretty girl. How glad he is that he has come. What a fool he was ever to dream of staying away, when his presence evidently adds to the pleasure of Mary Moriatty. As he thinks of it, he feels almost grateful to Mrs. Crosbie for her impertinent interference in his affairs.

"That horrid woman is coming," whispers May presently, as though her thoughts ran in unison with his own.

"I know she is. I passed her pony-carriage about half-a-mile behind. Mr. Somerset was driving her."

"How annoying! The Vicar would have been bad enough, but I never bargained for that long-legged stick of a curate. I made sure he would have been obliged to stay at home."

"Mary, my dear, you shouldn't speak so disrespectfully of the clergy," interposes her mother.

"Well, I'm sure no one could speak respectfully of them. I don't mind the Vicar so much, but I think Mrs. Crosbie's a cat. There ! it's out now, and I feel much better."

The rest of the little party had not done laughing at this impertinent sally when the carriage halted at the entrance to Outram Wood. Here the road was banked on either side with grass, at the top of which appeared a profusion of basket and hart's-tongue ferns, intermingled with pink foxgloves and pale-blue hyacinths, and overshadowed by fir-trees, which led into the denser portions of the wood.

"Shall we alight at once, or must we wait for our guests?" asks Mrs. Moriaty.

"My dear mother, we might have to wait an hour. Some of them have not even started. They all understood plainly we were to dine under the Druid's Oak; and I told the men not to unpack the hampers till we arrived. Let us go and get things ready for them. Doctor Vangel, do carry these shawls and rugs. Mamma would be afraid of taking cold if she sat on an oven. Give your horse to James; he will look after it with ours. Help mamma up the bank; that's right. Now, father, come along and do your share of the work. This is what I call *lovely*. A perfect day—no one sick or sorry—a beautiful picnic waiting for us—and five or six long hours to enjoy it in."

She lifts her face to the blue sky, and drinks in the exhilarating atmosphere as if it were a glass of wine.

"Oh, Doctor Vangel!" she repeats presently, "I am so glad you came."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PICNIC.

EACH word she utters, each look she gives him, makes the young doctor's heart throb like a sledge-hammer. He forgets his scruples—his self-condemnation—his *resolution*, and remembers only that the day is beautiful, *that he is full of life and hope*, and the girl he loves is *smiling on him*. As they gain the shelter of the Druid's

Oak, they see that the serving-men are there before them, with the hampers stored with plate, glass, linen, and eatables.

"How delightful!" cries May; "Robert and John are waiting for us, and we shall have all the fun to ourselves. There are Robert's two little girls, Bessy and Annie; I invited them to come and dine with their father afterwards, but I don't want them to help lay the dinner. Doctor Vangel and I are going to do that all by ourselves."

"My dear child, you are not going to lay the dinner yet, surely? It is not twelve o'clock," says Mrs. Moriarty.

"Oh, yes, mamma. We needn't eat it till we feel inclined; but half the pleasure lies in arranging it all, and I want to have everything ready before that interfering Mrs. Crosbie arrives. Don't let her sit next to me, Doctor Vangel. I shall stick a fork into her if you do. Sit next me yourself, and protect me from that horrid woman."

"And what shall *we* do whilst you young people are amusing yourselves?" demands Mr. Moriarty.

"Oh, papa, you and mamma must sit here and watch us. See I have made you a lovely seat with the carriage cushions and the rugs. Install yourselves there, and talk to us whilst we are busy."

So May rattles on, with a smile and a kind word for every one, and she and Lewis unpack the hampers and lay the cloth, and arrange the lobster salads, and pigeon pies, and cold fowls, and jellies and creams, and fruit and flowers, till the greensward bears a collation fit for a supper-party.

"Why, May," exclaims her father, "your picnic looks like a wedding breakfast, and your dress is that of a bride. We only want a bridegroom to make the picture complete."

Mary laughs heartily at the idea.

"Doctor Vangel shall be the bridegroom," she cries, as she pins a posy of white flowers in his buttonhole, and he

flushes scarlet under the operation. "There, papa, don't we look nice now! You've only to say, 'Bless you, my children!' and the thing's done."

"You've forgotten one important item, Mary," says Mrs. Moriatty, smiling; "the clergyman."

"Good gracious! so I have. Never mind, he'll be here soon, with his beloved Mrs. Crosbie. Hullo! here's an earwig in the salad. Doctor Vangel, *you* must look after the earwigs; I can't bear to touch them and I'll pick off all the stray leaves. Here come Nelly and Rachel Newham, and the Barretts. I must go and meet them," and off she springs like a young fawn to greet her friends.

Lewis flicks off an intrusive earwig, and sighs. Is she in jest or is she in earnest? Does she like him, or is she utterly indifferent to him? He cannot decide. All he knows is, that he likes her far too well for his own peace of mind. He remains thoughtfully in the same position until an influx of visitors obliges him to stand up and return their salutations. They all seem to arrive together, and, early as it may be, no one appears inclined to desert the dinner-cloth. Some throw themselves down upon the grass, fanning their heated faces with their hats; others turn their immediate attention to the champagne and cider cup. All look happy and contented except Mrs. Crosbie, who comes leaning on the arm of the long-legged curate, and complaining languidly of the heat, and the dust, and the distance.

"I always say," she commences, "why can't people have their picnics indoors instead of out? Then one would be certain of commanding shade in case of sunshine, and shelter in case of rain."

"But it wouldn't be a picnic," observes May bluntly.

"Why not, Miss Moriatty? I imagine the term 'picnic' is derived from the elements that compose a heterogeneous *assembly*, and not from the place in which the *entertainment is given*."

"I am sorry you thought it necessary to come, if you don't like dining out of doors," remarks Mrs. Moriatty. "We wished our little party to be a pleasure to our friends."

"My dear Mrs. Moriatty, I considered it my *duty* to come. What would any one think of a social gathering to which *the Vicar's wife* refused to lend her countenance? Mr. Somerset can tell you that I do more than this for those whom I call my friends."

"Indeed yes," interposes the Reverend Charles. Mrs. Crosbie's entire life is one self-sacrifice."

"Well, you needn't eat anything unless you like now you *are* here," says May pertly.

Mrs. Crosbie looks daggers at her. Miss Moriatty is almost as great an aversion of hers as Doctor Vangel.

"May, my dear, that is not polite," says her mother reprovingly.

"But, mamma, since Mrs. Crosbie so much dislikes picnics——"

"I am not aware that I said I disliked them, Miss Moriatty, and now that I have joined your party through all this terrible heat and dust, I could not think of being so rude as to refuse to make one at your little feast. Dear, dear! you mustn't make me out a kill-joy. I mean to be as merry as any of you. Mirth is not incompatible with the higher life; indeed, there are many passages in the Holy Scriptures where we are *told* to rejoice. Is it not so, Mr. Somerset?"

And Mrs. Crosbie, who loves champagne and lobster salad as much as any of her more worldly neighbors, puts on a look of infantine enjoyment, and draws close to the woodland spread. But May is not to be taken in by her tardy apology.

"All right. Come and rejoice, then," she answers tartly. "Mamma, dear, shall we begin at once? Doctor Vangel, you promised to sit by me. Nelly, come on the

other side, and, for goodness' sake," she adds, in Lewis's ear, "let us talk to each other, and not say another word to that *cat* for the rest of the day."

How happy he is sitting by her side, and attending to all her wants, and glancing up every moment to encounter her bright eyes beaming upon him. She is so anxious not to leave one loophole by which the Vicar's wife (who is watching her curiously from the other side of the table) can join in their conversation, that she talks to Lewis without cessation, not infrequently whispering her girlish jokes into his ear. Once she touches his arm to engage his attention, and the ordinary contact makes him tremble like a leaf. He drinks a glass of champagne to assuage his foolish nervousness. It raises his spirits, and he drinks another. Lewis Vangel is one of the most abstemious men in the world—from necessity rather than from choice. He is too unselfish to spend money on his own indulgence that could contribute to his mother's comfort. Consequently, he seldom takes anything stronger than home-brewed ale when in his own house. Of late years, a glass of champagne has become an unusual treat to him, and has a greater effect than it used to have in the days of old. On the present occasion it warms his blood, raises his courage, and even threatens to overcome his prudence. As the meal is merrily drawing to a conclusion, May catches sight of a girl's figure, shrinking as if from view, behind the trees.

"Oh, mother!" she says, in a lowered voice, "I do believe that is Ruth Williams. Poor Ruth, how frightened she looks. She dares not come near us. May I ask her to have some dinner with the servants when we have finished?"

She has risen as she speaks, and looks at Mrs. Moriaty expectantly.

"Well, yes, my dear, I don't see why you shouldn't," *replies her mother* dubiously. "It can't hurt us, and the

poor girl has suffered enough already. She will take it as a great kindness, and Heaven knows that none of us have reason to be hard upon our fellow-creatures."

Horror and consternation are the only feelings portrayed on the face of the Vicar's wife as she hears these words, and, rising to her feet, she holds up her hand in deprecation.

"Mrs. Moriatty, do I understand you to say *Ruth Williams*? Do I understand that you propose to bring that lost and degraded creature into *my* presence, and the presence of these young ladies and gentlemen? Then I must utterly protest against it. As the Vicar's wife, and his representative at your table, I solemnly protest against such a scandal. It will be a bad example to the whole of Withyslea. The Vicar has refused to administer communion to her. He is resolved that she shall be made an example to all her sex."

"But, my dear Mrs. Crosbie, you mistake me. I never thought of introducing Ruth Williams to the presence of my guests any more than I should my servants. I only gave May permission to invite her to dine with them after we have left the spot. That can surely hurt no one, and the poor girl has few pleasures now."

"Nor does she deserve to have," replies Mrs. Crosbie spitefully. "Let her reap as she has sown. You are the mistress here, Mrs. Moriatty, and, of course, must do as you think fit, but all I can say is, that if you persist in your determination, I must request leave to withdraw my presence from your festivities. The Vicar would never pardon my sanctioning such an outrage upon decency."

"I didn't think Mr. Crosbie would be so harsh," says Mrs. Moriatty, "but, of course, if you put it in that light, I must withdraw my permission. May, my darling, sit down again, and don't let poor Ruth think that you have seen her."

"But, mamma——"

"Say no more now, my dear, I beg of you. Our first consideration to-day must be towards our guests. Let us try and forget this painful incident."

They all profess to forget, as in duty bound, but it is very evident that they do not. Mrs. Crosbie snorts in silent indignation throughout the remainder of the meal. The young people's merriment has received a check, and they converse in subdued tones. Mr. and Mrs. Moriaty look annoyed (as well they may), and their daughter is only waiting the conclusion of the dinner to express her opinion on the subject. As soon as it is ended, she springs up, exclaiming,—

"Come, Doctor Vangel ! come, Nelly ! come, all of you, and let us have some games in the wood. Mamma, what time shall we have tea ? We're going miles away, but we will be back punctually at any hour you name."

"Say six o'clock, dear. We shall not be home then till nearly nine."

"All right, we won't forget ; and now, who'll play 'I spy,—I'"

A crowd of boys and girls run after her as she speaks, but as soon as she is out of sight of the Druid's Oak, she turns to Lewis.

"I don't really want to play," she says, "it is too hot, and it will be much nicer to stroll about and talk ; only I wanted to get rid of that horrid Mrs. Crosbie. Oh, how I *hate* that woman ! Isn't she detestable ? Isn't she ill-natured ? Fancy browbeating poor Ruth still, and looking at me as if I was a bold, wicked girl to wish to have anything to say to her. Do *you* think me bold, Doctor Vangel ? Are you shocked because I wanted to ask her to the servants' dinner ?"

"How can you ask me such a question ?" he answers ;
"I know, how pure and good you are, and that your *intention was dictated* only by kindness. Do you suppose *that you can* lower yourself by showing a little charity to

Ruth Williams? No! you raise yourself in my estimation, and that of every right-thinking person, by the act, and I am only surprised that Mrs. Crosbie did not show you the example of doing so. I cannot understand how people can profess to believe in the gospel, and to follow its precepts, and yet hound down a poor, ignorant girl like that."

"Oh, I am so glad to hear you say so! That is just what I think myself," cries May, "and so does mamma. When Ruth came home from service, and the village began to talk of her trouble, and to turn their backs upon her, mamma gave her a lot of clothes for her baby, and money, too, to support her through her illness. She says the reason so many women kill their poor little infants is because other women are so hard on them."

"Your mother is quite right, and it is no wonder, since she is so good and so sensible, that you are what you are. I love Mrs. Moriaty for what you have told me of her, and I—" but here Doctor Vangel stops.

"What?" says May.

"I cannot go on; I was about to say too much."

"Oh, no, you cannot do that. Do go on; finish what you were about to say. Whenever you talk to me, Doctor Vangel, I feel the better and the wiser for it."

Lewis tries to answer her appeal, but the words choke him. Shall he—*dare* he tell her what is in his heart? They have wandered a little apart from the rest whilst talking, and are walking side by side and close together, through a field of bracken fern, which rises as high as their knees. The interlacing branches of the trees meet overhead. They are shut in a bower of woodland beauty, and the voices of their party who have engaged in some outdoor pastime sound far away in the distance.

"Talk to me," repeats May, as she puts her hand through the doctor's arm, "tell me of the trouble and the sickness *that you meet with in Withyslea*, and mamma and I will

try to relieve it. I daresay you think, because I am always laughing and merry when we meet, that I have no more serious moments, but it is not true. Sometimes I feel quite wicked to be so happy and cared for, and to have so many luxuries, whilst my poorer neighbors endure hunger and hardship. But, you see, papa is rich, and I am his only child, and he thinks nothing too good for me. But if I had a friend like you, Doctor Vangel, some one who knew so much better than myself how I could alleviate trouble and pain, I would be only too glad to be guided by him. For you would not be so ridiculous about me as my dear parents are, and imagine that I must never be allowed to hear even the name of sorrow."

"I don't know," stammers Lewis; "I think, perhaps, you would find me quite as anxious to shield you from any painful knowledge as your father and mother may be, Miss Moriaty. The scenes you allude to are scarcely fit for one so young and innocent as yourself. Better leave them to mamma for a few years longer."

May turns and regards him curiously.

"Oh, doctor, you think me as silly and unfeeling as the rest of the world. Is it because I'm going to spend the rest of the season in London? Do you think I shall forget Withyslea whilst I'm there? Indeed, I shall not, and I should like to do something more for it before I go. Now, *do* help me! Don't let me grow hard-hearted and inhuman like Mrs. Crosbie."

"You will never be like Mrs. Crosbie if you live to a hundred."

"I am glad to hear you say that, because papa declares you're the cleverest young man he ever knew, so I hope you judge me aright. Oh, dear, how I wish I was wise!"

"Believe me, you are quite wise enough as you are."

"Ah, now you're laughing at me! I suppose I have *had every possible thing* crammed into my head, but it's *questionable if they have stayed there, and then a wom-*

an's brain can never be like that of a man. Doctor Vangel, if ever I'm married I should like to have a husband just like you—just as clever, and as good, and as gentle as you are, for I never heard you speak ill of a single soul."

She says it in the innocence of her heart, pressing closer to his side as she speaks. Were she not innocent, she could never make such a speech to a single young man, and when they are alone together. If she expects anything in return, it is to see the doctor smile at her words, perhaps even laugh heartily, and tell her he hopes her wish may be realized. But she is not prepared to see him turn pale, and knit his brows as though in pain.

"What is the matter? Have I said anything wrong?" she asks anxiously.

"No, no," he says, "but you try me so hardly, May."

"I try you? Oh! how?"

"By talking as you do. Is it possible you cannot see—that you do not know?"

He struggles with his feelings for a moment, and then, realizing that he has said too much, or too little, goes on rapidly,—

"Forgive me if I offend you, but I *must* speak out. Miss Moriarty, Mary, I cannot go on professing to be only your friend. *I love you*. Don't you see I love you, and that I never can be happy unless you love me in return, and promise that you will be my wife."

"*Your wife!* Oh, Doctor Vangel, don't go on! *Please* don't go on," she says entreatingly, as she withdraws her hand from his arm, "because it can never be."

"It can never be?" he repeats, in a strained voice.

"Oh, no, indeed! Papa and mamma would never allow it, and I have never thought of such a thing. I have never even thought of marriage. I am only eighteen, you see, and I want to live at home for many years longer. Indeed, I have never had a lover."

"You have a lover now, at any rate," he says bitterly.

"Oh, no! Don't say it again, please! Try and forget all about it! *I* will! Papa and mamma would be so vexed if you left off coming to see us, and I should be quite afraid to tell them what you have said. They would think it so strange. They would say, perhaps, that I had done something wrong."

"I will never mention it again, believe me, Miss Moriarty. Only tell me one thing. Do you care for anybody else?"

"Dear me, no! Who *should* I care for except my parents?"

"And you are sure you can never care for me?"

"Oh, *I do* care for you, Doctor Vangel, in a way, you know, but not *that* way! I want you for my friend, and my doctor, and—"

"Don't say any more," he interposes. "I understand it all perfectly. I have been a mad, presumptuous fool. Only forgive me, and don't betray me more than is absolutely necessary."

"I will *never* betray you," replies the girl indignantly; "I shall not tell even papa and mamma. But I wish you had'nt said it. I hate to give you pain."

"I shall get over it," says Lewis firmly. "It doesn't sound complimentary, perhaps, to say so, but I *must* get over it for the sake of my mother and my work. I cannot think now how I can have been so mad as to mention it. I a pauper, and you an heiress! But had you been as poor as Ruth Williams, May, I would have worked for you to my life's end."

"I am sure you would," she answers, half crying, "and I don't care a pin about money, Doctor Vangel, only—only—"

"Only you don't love me. Yes! I understand it perfectly, and I will never worry you again. Don't cry, dear," he whispers, as he sees the tears running down her

cheeks, "or all your guests will be wanting to know the reason."

"I—I—wish—I did—love—you," sobs poor May, with unaffected regret.

"I wish it also, but wishing won't do it, and I wouldn't take you as a free gift without. But let me still be your friend—not now, it is too soon just yet; but when you return from London, and want a good listener for the recital of all your gayeties, send for me, and depend on my behaving myself. And promise me another thing—that, if you are ever in trouble, you will let me help you."

"I do promise," says May, with a final gasp.

"Well, then, dry your eyes and let us go and join your friends, and have a game with them. You needn't stare so at the proposal. I mean to show you how strong I am, and then you will have no regret for my little disappointment." He leads her back to their party as he speaks, and, a few minutes after, they are both running, and hiding, and crying "Whoop!" from behind the broad trunks of the old forest trees. Surely such a termination was never known before to a rejected love suit. But Lewis Vangel thrusts his mortification and heartache out of sight for the rest of the day, and it is only when he reaches home again, and sits down in the solitude of his own chamber, that he will permit himself to recognize that he has passed through the bitterest pain that life has yet afforded him.

CHAPTER V.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

You may be sure that Lady O'More has not invited Mary Moriarty to spend six weeks with her without an object. *In the first place, she is not rich enough to entertain*

guests who can make no return for her hospitality. In the second, she is not the sort of woman to sacrifice her time and inclinations to minister to the happiness of anybody, far less of a niece who is a total stranger to her. Her treatment of her brother proves how selfish she is. He and she are the only children of their parents, and yet she has alienated herself from him for years past. She says it is because he has married a Protestant wife, and become a renegade from the old faith, but that reason would have weighed little or nothing with Lady O'More if it had been her interest to keep up the acquaintance. But the facts of the matter are these. There is only the difference of a year between the brother and sister, and she was married long before he ever dreamt of taking such a step.

Kathleen Moriarty was the belle of Dublin in her maiden days, and as vain and selfish as she well could be, and when Sir Connell O'More made her his wife, her self-consequence knew no bounds. Sir Connell was only a poor knight, living on the produce of his Irish estates, but Lady O'More visited London every season, and kept her carriage when at home, and considered herself the most important person in County Athlone. So, when upon the death of his parents her brother, Dan Moriarty, took to the brewing business, she resolved to drop him.

Had he been a Guinness or a Younger, to step into the money his father had made by trade before him, it would have been a different matter; but to begin on a small scale and to rise by degrees seemed so infinitely vulgar in the eyes of his sister, that she became ashamed to acknowledge the relationship between them. She put it off on her religious fervor, and her horror at the introduction of Protestantism to the family, though nobody was blinded by the excuse.

But of late years things had greatly changed. Sir Connell had been gathered to his fathers for some time past,

leaving his widow with an only son, Denis O'More, and an estate which she found herself utterly unequal to managing. The mutinous inclinations of Ireland had already shown themselves. Boycotting, moonlight murders, and mutilation of cattle were staining the face of the land with blood and infamy, and Lady O'More became too much alarmed to live upon her property. So she and her son migrated to London, where they had resided in a quiet way ever since,—during which events Mr. Moriarty, having amassed a fortune by brewing, had retired from business and settled at Withyslea, and his sister had more than once devoted a sigh to the remembrance that she had not played her cards well in that quarter. Rumor tells her that her brother is spending thousands a year upon his wife and daughter, and that the girl must inevitably prove an heiress on her father's death. Thousands a year, when she and her poor Denis have to subsist on hundreds! And Denis, too, with his handsome face and figure, and irresistible manners, who looks like a prince, and should live like one! It seems too hard.

Mr. Denis O'More really justifies his mother's partiality as far as outward appearance goes. He is a remarkably handsome man, with the Irish beauty he has inherited from her, and he is as false as he is beautiful. He is selfish, too, and he is idle. He should be working now (being in his thirtieth year) instead of living on his mother, but he has never been brought up to any profession, and is too lazy to get anything to do. Lady O'More remonstrates with him occasionally in her indolent fashion, but he takes no heed, and things go on as before.

"Denis, me darlin'," she will exclaim (for she retains the brogue of Kathleen Moriarty), "did ye go to the War Office yesterday to keep your appointment with Sir Edward Mason?"

"Faith, I forgot all about it," Denis replies nonchalantly.

"And ye did now? What a pity! The old gentleman will be thinking ye don't want the place. I suppose it would not do for ye to go to-day instead?"

"Oh, no! I would be wasting me time to attempt it. Besides, I have an engagement elsewhere."

"An' will ye write to him then, Denis?"

"Where's the use? He'll have given the appointment away to some one else. It's just my luck. Bad cess to it!"

And so his "luck" goes on from year to year, and, everything he might get slips through his fingers, and still, at thirty, though he must be clothed and fed, and provided with pocket-money, the handsome Denis O'More is living on his mother, and giving himself all the airs of a man about town. It is about this time that Lady O'More's eyes become opened to the necessity that her son should marry a woman with money. Surely, she thinks, his beautiful face and fascinating manners should be equivalents for any amount. He ought to run a good chance of winning the biggest heiress in town; but, unfortunately, big heiresses generally want big titles in exchange for their money, and needy Irish gentlemen, however handsome, may go to the wall. They are very charming to flirt with, or to dance with, or to go on the river with, but to *marry! Merci!* So Mr. Denis O'More continues to hang on hand, and then his mother suddenly thinks one day of her unknown niece, Mary Moriarty. The girl is sure to have money. To whom else should her brother leave it? And if she and Denis take a fancy to each other, what more natural than that this only son and only daughter of Dan and herself should bring the two families together again? Lady O'More forgets all her horror of Protestantism at that moment, also of brewing, and thinks only of the comfort it would be to see Denis happily settled in life, with a competency of his own. The upshot of her thinking is a letter to her brother, Mr. Moriarty, in which she *regrets the silence that has been so long maintained between*

them, and asks if he will allow his daughter to pay her a visit before the season is over, in order that she may give her a taste of London gayety. We have seen how this letter was received and answered. The Moriats are too unselfish to allow their offended dignity to stand in the way of May's pleasure, and the invitation is accepted in her name. Lady O'More is too diplomatic to let her son guess the reason of his cousin's visit. These silly, indolent women sometimes possess an amount of cunning to be equalled only by the lower animals. But she bespeaks his good offices on behalf of May. He has been more from home of late than she cares for, and at times she has feared he has some debt or other weighing on his mind, but she consoles herself with the reflection that, in that case, he will be all the readier, when the time comes, to listen to her suggestions respecting an alliance with his wealthy cousin.

"Denis, me darlin'," she says, on the morning that May is expected to arrive from Withyslea, "ye won't forget that your cousin Mary Moriatsy is to be with us to-day at dinner. You will help me to give her a welcome to London, won't you?"

"Yes," replies Denis yawning and stretching himself. "I shall be back to dinner."

"Ah, but before that, surely. I am going to meet the dear child at two. What will I do with her all the afternoon by meself?"

"What will ye do with her for six weeks then, mother? You won't ask me to dance attendance all the time, I hope?"

"No; but to-day ye might be here to bid her welcome. She'll feel strange amongst us at first. She has been brought up entirely in the country; but she's very pretty, they tell me, Denis. Quite a beauty! Like all the Moriats."

"Oh! Faith, then, I'll be home early," cries the young

man, laughing. "Ye never saw an Irishman turn his back on a pretty girl yet. Now did ye, mother?"

"Ah! and Mary's better than pretty," replied Lady O'More significantly. "She'll be rich enough one day to cover an ugly face. We must take care some fortune-hunter doesn't pick her up whilst she is here with us. I begin to feel quite nervous at the responsibility."

"I'll look after her for you, mother, and see she comes to no harm. It will be a pity if we can't take care of one little girl between us. I'll guard her like a brother meself."

"Ah! nonsense! There's little of a brother about you," cries Lady O'More. "You're a nice boy to talk like that, with the prospect of a pretty girl at your elbow. If ye do, I shall say there's no Irish blood in ye."

"We're the devils for the girls, mother, aren't we?" he answers, with a smile all over his handsome face, but it fades so suddenly that she is quite taken aback, and marvels what memory can have caused its disappearance.

"Denis," she whispered, "is anything wrong with ye? Are ye ill, me boy, or have ye lost money?"

"Neither," he answers, but she is not satisfied.

"Mary Moriarty will be a fine match for any man," she says suggestively. "I hear me brother is spending at the rate of ten thousand a year down at Withyslea."

"I daresay, but I sha'n't trouble her. Leave off worrying me about marriage, mother. I shall never settle down."

"Wait till you see Mary, me boy. Mrs. Anson, who was staying with the parson of Withyslea last summer, says she's a real beauty. Ye won't come to the station with me?"

"I can't if I'm to spend the evening at home. I had made another engagement for to-night, and I must go and put it off."

So Lady O'More is the only person who meets Mary

Moriarty on her arrival in London. She jumps out of the railway carriage all eagerness and excitement to greet her new relations, and is not disappointed in her reception. Lady O'More receives her niece with open arms. With all her selfishness she possesses the characteristic warmth of the Irish nation, a warmth which, though not very lasting, is real while it endures, and is apt to entrap a stranger into believing it to be real affection.

"Oh, me darlin' child," she cries effusively, as May approaches her, "and is this really Mary Moriarty? Are ye me own brother's daughter? A thousand welcomes to ye, and may ye never leave us again till you are tired of us. Let the porter look after your things, me dear, and come this way with me. I have a carriage waiting to take us home. Ah, it's not me own, ye see," she continues, as Mary enters the four-wheeler in which Lady O'More has driven to the station. "I'm not so rich as your dear father, Mary, but we'll try and make you happy, me dear, though you may miss some of the luxuries of home."

"Oh, aunt," exclaimed May, as she takes her hand, "I shall never think of them. They are less than nothing to me, and I am only too delighted at the prospect of spending a few weeks in London with you."

She thinks her Aunt Kathleen at that moment one of the most delightful women she has ever seen. She is very different from her mother, certainly, though she must be about the same age. Mrs. Moriarty, who is the possessor of a happy, placid temperament, and has lived in the country all her life, has a round, fair, unwrinkled face and a comfortable figure, neither too fat nor too thin. But she dresses very plainly, quite like an old woman, and wears her hair in smooth bands, after the fashion of her youth. Lady O'More, on the contrary, cannot forget that *she has been a beauty, and though fretfulness and anxiety have lined her face and thinned her hair, she still*

dresses in a manner more suited to a girl of eighteen than a woman of fifty. Those faded "beauties," by the way, invariably make uglier old women than those girls who have started in life with being plain. The large full eyes become too prominent and bird-like, the chiselled noses too pinched, the small mouths pucker at the corners, and the pearly teeth are the soonest to decay. But May, after the first glance of surprise, sees and hears nothing but her aunt's affectionate manner and words, and feels at home with her at once. They drive to a house in one of the old-fashioned squares at the top of Baker Street, the modest establishment of which consists of a very youthful footman and two maids ; but the girl continues to be enraptured with everything around her, even to the substantially-furnished, but rather dingy-looking, bedroom which is allotted to her use, and looks out upon the dusty trees and herbage of the square. But the bustle and the traffic, and the shops, and the continuous stream of passengers are all so new and wonderful to the unsophisticated country girl, that she throws up her bedroom window and leans her elbows on the sill, and drinks in the surrounding sights and sounds with rapture, and feels sufficiently happy to think she is actually in London. And when she joins Lady O'More in the drawing-room, her excitement at the prospect before her becomes still greater.

"Ah, here ye are again !" exclaims her aunt, with a shower of kisses, "as sweet and as fresh as the flowers in May. Stand a little to one side, me dear, and let me look at ye. Ah ! you have the Moriatty eyes and mouth, and the Moriatty figure—there's no doubt about that. Your hair is fairer than we have in our family—I suppose you take it from your mother—but it goes well with your Irish eyes. And your complexion, me love, why, it's just *like milk and roses*—what the boys used to call mine when *I was your age*. Well, you're a beauty. There's no mis-

take about that, and Denis will be proud to own ye for his cousin.

May's cheeks are all on fire by this time. She has not been used to be flattered so openly. Her father and mother, though thinking her nearly perfection, are not in the habit of mentioning her looks, but she likes it, all the same, although it makes her feel uncomfortably warm.

"I am glad," she falters, half-laughingly, "I am glad, Aunt Kathleen, that you are pleased with me."

"Pleased, me dear! I am charmed, delighted. I see meself again in you—as I was in my best days. And ye seem as fresh as a daisy after your long journey, and I thought ye would be so tired, else I would have told me son to bring in some tickets, that I might have taken ye to the theatre this evening."

"Oh, Aunt Kathleen, it seems too heavenly to be true!" cries May, clasping her hands together; "do you know, I have never been to a theatre in my life?"

"Never been to a theatre! Is it possible? What can me brother Dan have been about to have kept you in such ignorance? Well, you shall see plenty now, me dear, for, when I am unable to take ye, your cousin Denis will always be happy to fill my place. And ye must go to all the exhibitions, and the galleries of painting, and we must make a party down the river, and show you the beauties of the Thames."

May sits by in silent rapture.

"It is what I have longed for all my life," she says at last, "to visit the wonders of London."

"Ah! we won't do things by halves now ye are here, me dear," replied Lady O'More, "and I hope your parents said good-bye to ye with a good heart, for it'll be a long time before they see you back again at Withyslea."

May is smiling quietly at the vista of pleasure which is opened out by her aunt's assertion, when the door is flung open, and the impetuous Denis appears. It has been

said this man is singularly good-looking, in the best type of high-bred Irish beauty. Every one acknowledges so much, and he is generally mentioned as "Handsome Denis O'More." But May has simply never seen any man to equal him in personal qualifications, to which his soft, winning Irish tongue lends additional charm. He is almost equally struck by her appearance. He expected to see a pretty, rosy, country girl, but Mary Moriarty could not be passed over even in a London crowd.

"And is this my cousin?" he exclaims, as he grasps her offered hand, whilst his eyes betray his admiration of her. "My faith, mother, she's a Moriarty from tip to toe. Wouldn't she be toasted in the old country? I think some of the boys would be going mad over her. And when did ye arrive, my pretty cousin? And are ye very tired after your long journey? Make room for me beside ye on the sofa, and tell me all the news of Withyslea.

May, who, although her father is an Irishman, has not been used to associate with young men of that nationality, and is unacquainted with the extent of freedom they indulge in with the other sex, is rather taken aback, at the first blush, by Denis O'More's familiarity, but, perceiving that he means nothing by it but friendliness and a desire to set her at her ease, she soon becomes so.

"*Tired*, Denis!" echoes his mother. "On the contrary, she's so fresh and ready for sight-seeing that I've been lamenting I didn't ask ye to bring us in some theatre tickets for to-night."

"Will I run and get them now, and which theatre will we go to?" says Denis good-naturedly.

"Oh, don't take any trouble on my account," interposes May. "I shall be quite happy sitting here with Aunt Kathleen and you."

"Ye could hardly get down to a theatre and back before dinner time, Denis," says Lady O'More, consulting her watch; "but if the dear girl feels inclined to go out after

dinner, we will just drive down and take our chance, and if we can't get seats at one house, we will at another."

"That's the best of London," replies Denis, "ye need never be at loss for something to do."

Mary Moriarty believes that the ultimatum of everything has been reached, as she sits between her aunt and her cousin that evening in the stalls of the Lyceum, and watches the marvellous interpretation of Faust. The place—the scene—the wonderful pageant that is enacted before her, combined with their effusive affection, almost overcomes her. She thinks she has never been shown so much love before, not even from her parents. They have always been kind and good, but this is the first time she has found herself to be of some importance—that she has felt herself to be thoroughly appreciated. She cannot see a fault in either Lady O'More or her son. Their very accent charms her, with its delicate liquid vowels, and the indication of a brogue in the accentuation of its consonants. No language has ever sounded to her half so musical before.

When she returns from the theatre, giddy and excited, and retires to her room, she cannot rest till she has poured out her feelings to her mother.

"Oh, my darling mother" (she writes), "I am happier than I ever was in my life before. I cannot half tell you how delightful Aunt Kathleén is—nor how good to me. Papa has had a terrible loss in being parted from her so long. She is not a bit like him, but has the remains of great beauty, and such a sweet smile, and Cousin Denis is very like her. I had a lovely journey down, and ate all my sandwiches and cakes, and Aunt Kathleen met me at the station, and I wasn't a bit tired, so, when we had had dinner, she took me to the Lyceum Theatre. Oh, mamma, I felt as if I was in heaven. Mr. Irving is grand as Mephistopheles, and Miss Terry made me cry so. I was quite ashamed of myself. How I wished papa and you

could have been there too. But Aunt Kathleen and Cousin Denis are so *very* kind. And we are going to more theatres and exhibitions, and on next Sunday, if it is fine, we shall have a picnic down the river. I am not quite sure if you will like my going on a Sunday, mother dear, but I couldn't say no, because it would have looked like finding fault, and every one seems to do it in London. But I mean to ask Aunt Kathleen to take me to Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral on some Sunday, and that will be all right. This is a very nice house, though not so big as ours, and my bedroom is very comfortable, and has a large wardrobe for my dresses. I am feeling a little tired now, but could not go to sleep till I had told you how I have enjoyed myself. My best love to dear papa and you, from your affectionate daughter,

MARY.

"P. S.—Aunt Kathleen says I am just like the Moriats, with the exception of my fair hair, and that is an improvement. I am *so* glad she likes me."

CHAPTER VI.

COUSIN DENIS.

THIS letter gives immense satisfaction at the Withyslea Manor House, and a cordial permission is granted May to extend her pleasant visit as long as it is agreeable to all parties. And the favorable impression appears to be a mutual.

"And what do ye think of your cousin, me dear Denis?" demands Lady O'More of her son, a few days after May's arrival. She speaks with assumed carelessness, but she *is very anxious* for his answer.

"*She's a Venus*," cries the young Irishman enthusi-

astically, "a perfect Hebe. By Jove, mother, I think she's the prettiest girl I ever saw!"

"You're right, me boy, and she gets it from our side of the family into the bargain. Her mother's a poor plain body, and me brother Dan was never counted a beauty. But May will make a sensation wherever she goes, and it will be a happy man that gets her."

She has so set her heart on Denis marrying his cousin, that she is delighted to hear his panegyric on the subject of her looks, and hopes that, even at this early period of their acquaintance, he is forming an attachment for her.

"Ah, Denis," she continues, with a smile, "take care of your heart, me boy; an Irishman is always susceptible to beauty, and though I don't think you would run much chance of failure, yet, if you're in danger of losing it, make sure of the running before any rivals come on the field. I thought young M'Mahon was looking very sheepishly at May yesterday on the river."

Denis's handsome face becomes clouded. He really admires his young cousin; indeed, he is even now half afraid that he does more than admire her, and the idea of a rival is very distasteful to him.

"I should like to catch him at it," he answers, in allusion to M'Mahon. "May is in your charge, mother, and ye must guard her carefully from an-ny impertinences of that sort."

"Guard her yourself, me boy," returns Lady O'More, laughing; "we'll keep her close till you've made up your mind, and when you ask her to marry you, she won't say 'no.' But seriously, Denis, it will be a fine match for ye. Me brother is sure to leave her all his money, and will doubtless make a good settlement on her marriage, especially if she marries his own sister's son. Think of it, me dear, it is worth your while." But Denis is frowning ominously.

"*Why will ye be always thrusting marriage down my*

throat, mother?" he says. "I'm not the boy for it; I've told ye that a score of times, and it's hard that a fellow can't even admire a pretty girl without having her thrown at his head or a wife."

"*Hard*, do ye call it?" retaliates Lady O'More. "It's hard you'll find it, Denis, when some other man walks off with her and her money right under your nose. I wouldn't be teasing ye, dear, but I want you to look at the matter in a practical light. You're sadly in want of money, Denis, and your handsome face would have got it for ye long ago if you hadn't been so obstinate. But beauty and youth don't last forever, me boy, and for my sake (if not for your own) you should settle yourself as soon as convenient."

"Well, I'll think about it," says Denis gloomily.

"Promise me one thing," continues Lady O'More pleadingly, "and that is, that you'll take your pretty cousin about, and make her stay in London as pleasant to her as lies in your power."

"Oh, I'll promise ye that readily enough," exclaimed Denis eagerly; "and after all, who has more right to take her about than her own cousin by the father's side? She is very anxious to see Hampton Court Palace and Bushy Park; couldn't we go there to-morrow, mother?"

"*You* can take her, me boy, and spend the day there. I feel tired with so much sight-seeing, and will be glad of a little rest," says Lady O'More diplomatically.

Denis shrugs his shoulders, but offers no objection, and the next day finds him and May in the country together, spending several hours in each other's society, whilst Lady O'More sits at home, smiling at the success of her generalship.

Every one knows how much love depends upon propinquity and opportunity, and, given a young man and *woman of prepossessing manners and appearance, and both free to make a choice*, it is a hundred to one that

they will choose each other. To Mary Moriarty this close communication with Denis O'More is an entirely new experience. She has romped at home with the brothers of her girl friends, but she has scarcely ever spoken seriously to a man in her life, except, indeed, to Lewis Vangel at the picnic party. And her cousin Denis is an entertaining as well as a charming companion. His glib tongue can run freely on all topics, and he is a man of the world, who has seen a great deal to talk about, and knows how to make the most of his subject. It may be believed, too, that he does not confine his conversation entirely to amusing his companion. A thousand delicate compliments, paid only as an Irishman knows how to pay them, are interlarded with everything he says until Mary learns to look for them, as she does for her daily food. It is surprising how often her Aunt Kathleen feels unequal to joining them in their little excursions. May has not been long in London before she discovers that Lady O'More (however charming) is in full possession of two of the national characteristics—indolence and untidiness. She lies on a sofa half the day, clad in a soiled dressing-gown, with her hair hanging about her face, and her lace cap awry, and it is quite an effort to her to dress herself properly in order to attend an evening entertainment. Added to these infirmities, she now gets up a fictitious ailment—neuralgia in the eyes—which affects her whenever she sees a good opportunity for leaving the young people together. May is at first anxious to repay her aunt's kindness to her by acting as nurse, but when she has had it duly explained that any company is sure to make the malady worse, and the only cure for it is silence and solitude, she is glad enough (as any other girl would be) to turn to the society of her light-hearted cousin. In consequence, she is often taken by Denis to the theatre or other entertainments alone, and Lady O'More seldom *accompanies them*, except on such occasions when the

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presence of other people renders a *tele-à-tele* impossible. May's life is now one round of gayety. The O'Mores have many friends, and dances, picnics, and river parties, succeed one another with rapidity. Denis is always bringing home theatre and concert tickets, chiefly given him by his acquaintances, so that their mornings and evenings are alike taken up. May's home letters are full of accounts of the wonders she is passing through.

"I am sorry to tell you," she writes in one, "that dear Aunt Kathleen is suffering from neuralgia in her eyes, which often prevents her accompanying Cousin Denis and me to the theatre. Don't you think, mother dear, that those drops Doctor Vangel recommended you for the *tic-doloureux* might do her some good? Send me the prescription if you have it, and if not, please ask Doctor Vangel for it. It grieves me to see her in such pain. I have been to two dances since I last wrote. Aunt Kathleen would insist upon taking me, though I am sure she was hardly fit for it. But I did so enjoy myself. Cousin Denis is a beautiful dancer, and our steps suit exactly. He is surprised to find me so light, considering my height. I wish you and papa could see Denis. I am sure you would like him. Aunt Kathleen says he is so clever, he might have been a diplomat or anything else, only he is so proud, he will never ask for an appointment. What will you say when I tell you that I am getting quite an Irish accent from talking to them both so much? I hope you won't mind. I think it awfully pretty myself! What a long time it seems since I have seen you and papa! Well, the season will soon be over now, and then I suppose I shall return home. But Aunt Kathleen says she looks on me as one of *her* children now, and that I must come back very soon and pay her another visit. Oh, they *are* delightful—both of them!" By which it will be seen that the heart of the little *country maiden* is becoming seriously touched, and that *home joys* are already receding in the distance, if not

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eur, and how she will try to be humble and gracious to all, and not too proud of having become Mrs. Denis O'More. Sometimes, as she is musing after this fashion, May will picture the sad face of young Doctor Vangel amongst the crowd of her acquaintances, looking as he did when she told him it could "never be." But when that crisis arrives she will jump up hurriedly and dispel her day-dream, and heave a little sigh at the remembrance of that little episode in her career, while she wishes sincerely that it had never taken place.

As the weeks go on, and May does not come to her aunt with a beaming face to announce that Denis has proposed to her, Lady O'More thinks it as well to question the young lady on the subject.

"May, me darling child," she commences one afternoon as she lies in the couch with half closed eyes, and the girl sits beside her, busily employed in embroidering a pocket handkerchief for her mother, "are ye happy with us?"

May's pretty face glows like the setting sun.

"Oh, Aunt Kathleen, yes! What can make you ask me such a question?"

"And you like your Cousin Denis?"

"We are the best friends, auntie."

"Ah! but you should be more than friends with the only son of your father's only sister! You should *love* him. Don't you love him, May?"

"I am attached to him, aunt, as I am to you."

"Ah, ye sly puss! Do ye think that the boy will be satisfied with that? Now, tell me. Isn't it the truth that he says ye are the prettiest girl he's ever seen?"

May bends her crimson face over her work.

"He *has* said he thinks I am pretty," she answers, in a low voice.

"The rogue! Trust him for telling ye. And did he *squeeze your hand* whilst he said it, child?"

"Oh, auntie!"

"Why would you mind telling his own mother? How often has he kissed ye, now?"

"Not very often," replies May shyly

"Not very often! I wonder how you children calculate! And has he asked you to be his wife?"

May throws down her work, and, rising suddenly, kneels by Lady O'More's side, and buries her face in her bosom.

"Don't ask me, auntie," she whispers rapidly; "he has never said anything—he never may. And if he were to hear I had discussed the subject, even with you, he would think me so bold—so unmaidenly!"

"Why, me darling, ye don't suppose I'd ever breathe a word to him that passed between us? No, no! I've set me heart upon the match too much for that, and it'll all come right by-and-by. For it's my greatest wish, May, to see you and Denis man and wife, and to have ye for my daughter as well as my niece."

"Oh, auntie! how very, *very*, good you are to me."

"Not at all, me dear. Isn't it natural I would prefer to see me boy marry me own brother's daughter to an-ny other girl? We will have no more coldness then between the Moriatys and the O'Mores."

"No, indeed," responds May fervently.

"And so, when Denis asks you to marry him, say 'Yes' with a good heart, May, and remember it is his mother's greatest wish to see ye one."

"You make me so happy," says the girl, as she resumes her former position; "I *have* thought of it, auntie—just a little—but I have never dared to hope it would come to pass."

"It will come to pass, sure enough, me darlin', and we will all be one family yet. But ye must encourage the dear boy a little. Don't be too bashful, May. An Irishman is *easily* disheartened, and Denis will be thinking

you don't care for him unless ye let him see it by your words and manner."

Were May a little more sophisticated than she is, she might open her eyes at this new reading of an Irishman's characteristics, but she accepts it all in good faith, and resolves not to daunt her timid lover more than she can possibly avoid. Denis O'More continues to make love to her, but he does not propose. This does not distress her, however. She feels sure he loves her and what can such love end in but marriage? She is quite content to let the happy time go on while she is waiting for the moment that shall decide her fate. Her cousin becomes more devoted and more demonstrative each day. He exacts all the little favors from her that a girl is used to grant her *fiance*, and if she ever demurs at his boldness, the handsome Irish eyes look straight into hers, whilst the winsome Irish tongue falters deprecatingly,—

"An' ye don't love me, then?"

May cannot resist him. She is fain to falter,—

"Oh, Denis, you know I do!" and life once more rings out like a peal of happy wedding bells. Yet still her cousin has not actually asked her, in so many words, to be his wife. More than once, indeed, he is betrayed into speaking against marriage in a tone that has startled her.

"Only fancy," he says one day to his mother, "that fool Horne has married Miss Dicks! A man with a thousand a year of his own, and who could live like a fighting-cock as long as he kept single. He must be an idiot to throw away all his chances for a woman!"

"Ah! but, Denis, perhaps he loves her," expostulates Lady O'More.

"He won't love her long, I bet. He's gone the right way to cure *that* disorder," he answers grimly.

May listens to him with consternation. Is this really *his opinion of marriage*? Her blue eyes well over with *sudden tears*, and she rises hastily and leaves the room.

"What's the matter now?" exclaims Denis, as the door closes upon her.

"Eh, child, you've hurt her feelings. What makes you speak of marriage in that careless fashion before her? Can't ye see she loves ye? Denis, me boy, that girl's your own for the asking, and *you* will be the fool if ye let this sort of thing go on much longer without clenching the nail on the head, and getting her promise to be your wife."

Denis mutters something about wishing his mother would let him alone to manage his business his own way, but, as he is quitting her presence, he turns round and says,—

"An' ye're *sure* that she loves me, then?"

"*Sure!*" echoes Lady O'More; "who wouldn't be sure who saw her eyes turn upon ye? She loves every bone in your body, and that ye may lay your life on."

"Poor little darlin'!" exclaims Denis, in a compassionate tone, "perhaps she does. But see here, mother. Don't ye interfere in this matter. If it's to be, it'll be, and if it isn't to be, it won't. But an-nything like meddling will put a stop to it altogether," and Lady O'More, in her anxiety for a happy consummation to her wishes, promises to be quiescent.

Denis smoothes over this little *contretemps* with May in a fashion that strengthens instead of weakening their mutual attachment, and her faith in him is rivetted with fresh fetters. But when the season is drawing to a close, nothing has been definitely settled between them, and Lady O'More feels fretfully that she must either send Mary Moriaty back to her parents, and let Denis's chance slip through his fingers, or take her on with them to Paris. She decides upon the latter alternative. It will cost a little extra money, but it is a sprat laid out to catch a herring, and *she is becoming fidgetty at Denis's indecision. At Paris, away from the eyes of their acquaintances, the*

young people will feel still more free, and she will take care to throw them, by every possible means, in each other's way. So another letter is despatched to Mr. Moriatty at Withyslea, in which Lady O'More gushes, in true Hibernian style, over the charms of her niece, and her overwhelming love for her, and begs that he and Mrs. Moriatty will spare her, just for a fortnight or three weeks longer, to accompany her to Paris. The fond parents, anxious only for their daughter's welfare, and rather proud that she should have so ingratiated herself in her aunt's good graces, gave their permission for an extended leave of absence with pleasure, and it is soon known all over Withyslea that Mary Moriatty is going to Paris with Lady O'More, and may be expected to return home in the autumn, full of French airs and graces, and turning up her nose at everything and everybody in her native village.

CHAPTER VII.

LEWIS'S CONFESSION.

MISS CASSIE PREW is the old maid *par excellence* of Withyslea, and has the longest and the bitterest tongue in the village. It is all very well for some authors to stand up for old maids, and pronounce them misrepresented and maligned. Of course there are exceptions to this rule as to every other. There are venomous married women as well as venomous virgins, but, *as a rule*, there is no doubt that being left upon the shelf does not improve a woman's temper, nor increase her love for her own sex. It is only necessary, in order to prove this, to watch the looks of an old maid in an omnibus, or any other place where one cannot give vent to one's sentiments, if a *young and pretty girl* enters the vehicle. How she *scrutinizes her features* and her dress, and "sniffs" with

ill-concealed disdain of both ! It is very contemptible, but it is very pitiful. Nature intended us all to be mated, and the unnatural life a single woman has to live against her own inclinations is one of the wrongs of the sex. The most trying time for her is when hope has not yet fled—say from thirty to forty—, but when she sees it diminishing day by day, as the charms of youth disappear to give place to crow's-feet and gray hair.

Miss Cassie Prew has reached that undefinable age, just over the thirties, when she can neither be termed old nor young. Her brown hair is still thick and glossy, and she wears it in thick curls, like sausages, hanging on either side of her face. She has a habit of twisting these curls round her fingers in a girlish sort of way, that makes her look nearly double her age. She has sharp features, and small, inquisitive eyes, and she is very sweet and soft-spoken with men, and just the contrary with women, especially if they are nice-looking girls like Mary Moriarty, whom Miss Prew is bound to dislike, because Mrs. Crosbie dislikes her. For Cassie Prew is the bosom friend of the Vicar's wife, as prying and curious, and at times, almost as insolent. She is the jackal to Mrs. Crosbie's lion, her purveyor of scandal, her "picker-up of unconsidered trifles," which they talk over together until they transform them into crimes.

Miss Prew is an institution in Withyslea, being a native of the village. Her father, Doctor Prew, held for forty years the appointment which is now filled by Lewis Vangel. He began his married life in the same tumble-down cottage which is Lewis's home, but moved later on to a larger house, where he took charge of several lunatics.

Wotton House stands just opposite to the little cottage which Miss Prew now occupies. From her parlor window she looks on the tall iron gates which enclose two grass plats, divided by a flagged pathway leading up to the hall

door. The building is not prepossessing from the outside, having been erected in the era of ugliness, and looks very much like a lunatic asylum or a jail. But it has fine lofty rooms, and at the back a grand old garden, with a large court-yard and stables. Miss Prew was born in Wotton House, and her father died there, and she often looks wistfully through the iron gates, and thinks of the time when the place was peopled with happy faces, and echoed with merry sounds.

For the house has had no tenants since they left it. One of Doctor Prew's patients inconsiderately cut his throat whilst there, and the event cast a gloom over the property, which no one has cared to disperse. The old doctor died, leaving his sons in steady practices in London, and his only daughter an income of a hundred and fifty pounds a year.

Many persons wonder why Miss Prew does not live with one of her married brothers. It would be so natural for them, being settled, and with families, to give their sister a home. They don't know that the scheme has been tried and failed, and that her scandalous, backbiting tongue has made so much mischief in both establishments that neither of the wives will consent to her crossing the threshold again. So she has returned to Withyslea, and rents a tiny cottage, where she lives with a little maid of fourteen years old, whose life is a burden to her. But Miss Prew spends most of her time at the Vicarage, where she fawns over Mrs. Crosbie, and fetches and carries for her like a dog.

If Cassie Prew has any designs of matrimony left, she is too cunning to exercise them at the Vicarage. She leaves the curates religiously alone, for she knows there would be an end to all the perquisites and the patronage if she did not do so. Mrs. Crosbie caresses her at one moment, and treats her like a servant the next, and Miss Prew takes it all in good part, and sounds the praises of

the Vicar's wife everywhere. She is very fussy and interfering amongst the villagers, as may be supposed, and carries all sorts of tales to Mrs. Crosbie, who makes use of them as she may think fit. And if anybody is ever bold enough to question what she can see to admire in the old maid's company, the Vicar's wife draws herself up, and replies that "Miss Prew is, at all events, *a lady*, and that is something to be grateful for in Withyslea." So Miss Cassie Prew is as much disliked, and almost more feared, than her patroness, as she has so many more opportunities of hatching scandal. She is clipping the dead blossoms off the rose-trees in her little front garden one morning, as Lewis Vangel passes the gate. She has a silk handkerchief tied over her curls to keep the sun off her head, and does not look any the better for the arrangement. But, as she catches sight of the young doctor, she whisks it off, and shakes her ringlets into position. There was a time when Cassie cherished a secret hope that Lewis Vangel might turn his matrimonial eyes in her direction. She has been reared in the creed that it is absolutely necessary that a medical man should have a wife, and what would be more natural than he should marry the daughter of his predecessor? Her hundred and fifty pounds would more than double his income and they might really have lived quite comfortably on that modest sum in so quiet a village as Withyslea. But that hope has died out now for some time past. Four years is long enough for a young man to make up his mind, and Lewis has never even paid her a compliment yet. So Cassie has taken to abusing him, at all events before Mrs. Crosbie, and decrying him as an unworthy successor to her gifted father. Yet she certainly pulls off that handkerchief as soon as ever she sees him, and, picking a half-opened rosebud, holds it coquettishly across the wicket gate.

"Good-morning, Doctor Vangel! Will you accept a rose for your button-hole?"

Lewis smiles as he fastens the blossom in his coat.

"Thank you, Miss Prew! I love a rose above all other flowers. And how beautiful they have been this season."

"Yes, indeed! The Vicarage garden is one mass of bloom. How is Mrs. Vangel?"

"As well as usual, thank you. She is never very strong, you know."

"I hear you have your sister with you?"

Lewis's face brightens.

"Yes, indeed! She gave us a joyful surprise by walking in yesterday, just as we had sat down to dinner."

"And how long will she stay?"

"Only a week."

"I wonder she can get leave. She is, I believe, a—a—" and here Miss Prew clears her throat as though the word stuck in it.

"An hospital nurse at St. Swithin's," replies Lewis boldly. "The acting surgeon gave her leave, of course. There have been a great many cases of typhoid fever in the hospital, and Anna nearly broke down from overwork. But a week of country air will set her up again."

Miss Prew shrinks away from him.

"Typhoid fever, Doctor Vangel! Dear me, that is very infectious! I hope Miss Vangel will not bring it here. Above all things, she mustn't call at the Vicarage until she has been thoroughly fumigated. Think of dear Mrs. Crosbie and those sweet children, and *pray* be cautious, Doctor Vangel."

Lewis laughs carelessly.

"Don't alarm yourself, Miss Prew. To tell you the truth, I don't think Anna has any idea of calling at the Vicarage. Her holiday will be too short to be wasted in paying formal visits."

"But to the Vicar's wife! Surely it is a *duty*," exclaims *Cassie*.

"*Do you see it in that light?* I don't," rejoins Lewis.

He is going on then, but she detains him with another remark.

"I suppose you have heard the latest news about Mary Moriaty?"

He stops and answers quickly,—

"No, I have not been at the Manor this week."

"I met Mrs. Moriaty yesterday, and she gave me a long account of all her doings. She's actually left London with this Lady O'More, and gone over to Paris, and there's no telling when she'll be back again."

"They must miss her terribly at the Manor."

"Oh, do you think so? I fancy they are enjoying the relief of her absence. She has always been a tiresome and disobedient girl. But what a visit to be paying. How long has she been gone now?"

"Seven weeks yesterday," says Lewis promptly.

"Ah, you've kept a better reckoning than I have. Well, I call it very selfish to leave her parents so long, but Mary always *was* selfish. That comes of spoiling her as they've done. She thinks of no one but herself."

"Is Mrs. Moriaty distressed at her continued absence?"

"No. She seems rather pleased than otherwise that the girl should see Paris. But she'll be unbearable when she comes back, mark my words! Parisian costumes, I suppose, and Parisian manners, and perhaps a Parisian husband—there's no saying."

"I think it's very probable indeed!" responds the doctor, with a faint smile. "Miss Moriaty is not likely (under any circumstances) to remain single long."

"Well, the Moriats had better take care what they're about in giving her so much liberty," says Miss Cassie oracularly. "I've heard of English girls marrying French Counts and Marquises before now, who turned out to be nothing but crossing sweepers and organ-grinders when the wedding-day was over. They hold their heads very *high because they happen to have a little more money than*

the rest of us, and they have a lady of title in the family, but their pride is all the more likely to have a fall. "

" I trust not, most sincerely," replies Lewis indignantly, " for Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty are by far the best and the kindest people in Withyslea, and if they are proud of their daughter, it's only natural, and any one else would be the same. "

" *The best and the kindest people in Withyslea!* " echoes Miss Prew, holding up her hands. " Doctor Vangel do you mean to say you put them above the Reverend Mr. and Mrs. Crosbie ? "

" Miles and miles above," responds Lewis fervently ; " and if you like, you can go and tell the Crosbies so. "

And before Miss Prew can remonstrate with him upon his blasphemy, he has stridden away to make his parish rounds.

But he cannot help meditating on what he has heard in the course of his morning labors. Mary Moriarty not satiated yet with seven weeks of gayety. Still anxious to leave home behind her, and cross the sea with these strangers to a foreign land. What did it portend ? What attraction kept her there, away from the loving arms of her father and mother—she who had never left their side before for more than a few hours ? Was there a lover ? Had she pledged her word to marry somebody ? Were her parents keeping the secret at her own request from the gossips of Withyslea ? Pshaw ! What could it matter to him ? She had refused his offer. There was an end of it as far as he was concerned ; and he had no further part nor lot in the matter. Yet the painful thoughts which the subject engenders leave their traces on his countenance, and his sister remarks it to herself as soon as they meet again.

Anna Vangel is a thoroughly good and reliable young woman of five-and-twenty. There are no weak points in *her character*. She may be mistaken on occasions (as all *mortals are liable to be*), but she has laid down a hard

and fast rule for her own guidance, and what she believes in she sticks to against the world. Firm, gentle, and self-reliant, she is admirably fitted to be a nurse or a friend. She dearly loves her brother. Although he is older, and perhaps cleverer than she is, his temperament is one far more likely to suffer as it passes through the bitterness of life, for Lewis is more of a dreamer and less of a worker than his sister. He has changed considerably, both in manner and appearance, since the picnic in Outram Wood, but his mother has not perceived it. She is old, and more engrossed with herself than a younger person would be, and she is rather blind into the bargain, and cannot see her son's face clearly. But Anna has remarked the alteration in him from the moment of their meeting, and resolved to mention it on the first favorable opportunity. So, when she sees the sad look deepened when Lewis returns home on the present occasion, she decides there is no time like the present. It is the young man's custom after his early dinner to have a pipe in the little orchard at the back of the house before he starts off again upon his duties. There—as soon as the meal is ended—Anna trips after him, and links her arm in his. She has a winning face, although she is not handsome, and a winning way about her, especially with Lewis. She does not try to wheedle his confidence out of him. They have been dear friends and confidants all their lives, and she considers it her right to share his troubles and his joys. So she comes to the point at once. "Lewis, dear, what's the matter with you? You have some trouble that you have hidden from me. I can read it in your face. Let me hear it, and see if we can find a remedy."

Lewis changes color, and shakes his head.

"It would be useless, Anna. There is no remedy."

"Has it to do with money?"

"No."

"You are not ill, surely?"

"I never was better in my life."

"Is it your position that worries you? Are you unhappy at Withyslea?"

"Not exactly. I cannot deny, Anna, that the life is monotonous and unsatisfying, and that I am ambitious of a higher sphere. But it means meat and drink for mother and myself, and I must be content with it, at all events whilst she lives. Oh, no! my life at Withyslea has never worried me to that extent."

"Then I can only think of one other thing, Lewis, and I hope that is not true. You have formed some unhappy attachment."

The young man colors again, and is silent. "What is the obstacle, my dear brother? Is she a married woman?"

"Dear me, no! I hope you don't imagine I go running after my neighbors' wives?"

"I know you would not. You are far too good and honorable to do such a thing. Only men have sometimes been betrayed into a passion before they knew they were in any danger, and had to spend the remainder of their lives in trying to conquer it. But I hope *you* would have sufficient resolution to stamp it out at once, Lewis."

"I don't know, Anna. I am afraid I am not so strong as you give me credit for. But it is nothing of the kind. Sit down here, and I will tell you all about it."

He throws himself on the grass at the foot of an apple tree as he speaks, and his sister sits down beside him, and places her hand upon his knee.

"I have made a fool of myself, that is what is the matter with me, and my pride won't let me get over the disappointment easily. Besides, I love her, unfortunately, and I never found out to what extent until she refused to *marry me*."

"Oh, my poor Lewis, have you gone through the pain of rejection?" cries Anna sympathetically.

"It was my own fault. I had no right to mention the subject to her. I can't think how I came to do it, but she was so kind, and seemed to want to be alone with me, and I thought, perhaps——"

"She, she!" interrupts his sister, "but *who* is this unappreciative she who fails to see all your excellent qualities, Lewis?"

"Didn't I mention her name? Mary Moriaty."

Miss Vangel starts.

"Mary Moriaty! What! the heiress?"

"Oh, Anna, I never thought once about her being an heiress," cries the young doctor, with a shamed face. "I have known her intimately (as you have heard) for years. Mr. and Mrs. Moriaty have always been very kind to me, and made me welcome at their house at all times. I have romped with Mary ever since she was a little girl, and she has fought me, and scratched my face, and kissed me, and I have never thought of her, excepting as the daughter of my friends. But one unlucky evening—I can't tell how it came about—perhaps it was hearing the news of her going away, but a light seemed suddenly to break on me, and I recognized that she was no longer a little girl, but a young woman, and that I would give all the world to make her my wife."

"My poor Lewis. What madness. She an heiress, and you with a hundred and twenty pounds a year."

"That's just what it is, Anna—*madness*. You have found the right word for it. But we treat lunatics gently, my sister, because they are not in their right minds. And, oh, it is such unutterable pain to be—*mad*."

He turns his face away from her, and she knows that he is fighting to keep back his tears.

"And you told her of your affection?" she whispers presently.

"Yes, that is where I take so much blame to myself. I *tried* not to do it, Anna. When I found out my folly, I resolved to keep out of her sight until she left Withyslea. But she asked me to a picnic. She seemed to make a point of my going, and you know how weak we men are. I could not resist seeing her once more before we parted, and then chance threw us together, and alone, and she began to speak so sweetly to me, it all came out before I knew what I was doing."

"And what did she say in return?"

"Everything that she should; nothing that she should not. She answered me in a perfectly frank and womanly manner. She said she liked me, but she had no wish to marry; that she had never even thought of such a thing, and that it could never be. That was all."

"What happened afterwards?"

"Afterwards? Oh, we went and had a game of hide-and-seek together! I thought it would be the best way to make her believe that her refusal had not hurt me too much."

"Lewis, you are the dearest and the best man I ever knew! Mary Moriarty has lost a treasure by her stupidity."

"Don't talk such nonsense, Anna. She promised not to betray my secret, and I feel sure she will keep her word. I would not have her parents know of my proposal for all the world. They would think I was after her money; that is what makes the remembrance so bitter to me, when I was as innocent of thinking of anything but my deep love and admiration for her as if she had been a dairymaid."

Anna Vangel sits silent for a few minutes after her brother's confession, digging up the grass with the point of her parasol. Then she asks seriously, —

"Lewis, are you sure Miss Moriarty doesn't care for you?"

"Quite sure!"

"Why shouldn't she? You are young and nice-looking and she has known you so long."

"Haven't I told you she refused me? Isn't that proof enough?"

"By no means! Girls constantly refuse an offer they are afterwards glad to accept. A dozen things may make them do it. Nervousness, shyness, a want of knowledge of their own feelings, which, when they come to analyze at their leisure, they find quite different from what they imagined. I can't understand a girl with a free heart refusing *you*."

"Why put such thoughts into my head, Anna? It would be the greatest misfortune for Mary Moriarty to make such a discovery. Surely one of us is enough to suffer for the mistake?"

"But if she loves you, dear, the suffering would cease."

"I don't see that. I can never marry any woman on my miserable income."

"Not a poor girl, perhaps; but you could a rich one."

"And do you think I would consent to make any woman's fortune a stepping-stone to marriage?"

"Why shouldn't you, if she has the money and you have not? I think a great deal of rubbish and high-falutin' nonsense is talked about money. If people love each other sufficiently to become *one*, what *can* it signify *which* one has the means to compass their mutual happiness? If money *can* purchase happiness, it has reached its highest good. But perhaps Miss Moriarty is not sufficiently noble to be able to give as gracefully as she would receive."

"I think she has the making in her of a great and good woman, if circumstances permit her to be so. But, my dear sister, why buoy me up with hopes that will never be realized? Even if Mary loved me, which she has told me very plainly *she* does not, Mr. Moriarty would never be

such a fool as to give his only daughter to a village doctor without any prospects."

"But, if he is rich, he might give you prospects—he might command an opening for you. Other men have done as much for their sons-in-law," says Anna practically.

"Oh, you little schemer," exclaims Lewis, "you would talk a man into denying his seven senses at this rate, No, no, dear Anna. Let the matter rest. I have told you my trouble, and now I shall try and forget it again. Miss Prew's chatter revived it somewhat to-day, or you should not have found it out so easily.

"Wouldn't I? Why, Lewis, I saw there was something the matter with you before I had been in the house ten minutes. My dear brother, you are very much changed. Your face is as long as a hatchet, and your figure seems to me to have fallen away. You have been fretting terribly over this business. It is no use denying it to me."

"I have no wish to deny it. It is no dishonor," replies Lewis, with a faint smile. "I would have given anything, Anna, to get away from Withyslea during the last two months; but, of course, it was impossible. I never felt the drudgery—I may say the slavery—of a parish appointment so much before. Were it not—"

"Go on, Lewis."

"I am afraid you will think me very discontented, but I was about to say, were it not for mother, I would go straight to America, with only the clothes upon my back, and make my own way by hook or by crook sooner than endure the aching heart-hunger that oppresses me here."

"Lewis, dear, couldn't I take mother off your hands? I believe Doctor Saltburn would give her some employment in the hospital, and sooner than you should suffer like this—"

The young man raises himself on his elbows, and looks her reproachfully in the face.

"Anna, what have I said to make you speak like this? Take our mother away from Withyslea—let her *work*, feeble and old as she is, mew her up in a London hospital at her age, and all that I may be able to conquer a love-sick fancy a little quicker than I can do here? Oh, for shame. You make me blush to think I have been so weak as to repose my confidence in you."

"No, Lewis, don't say that, for I believe the unburthening of your mind has done you good. But I feel so for you, dear; and it does seem hard that, after all your ambitions and expectations, you should be bound down to live out your daily round of life in this secluded village. It must cramp you like a prison, and now the house of your best friends will be, I suppose, closed to you."

"Oh, I don't know that," responded her brother cheerfully. "I have quite made up my mind that Miss Moriarty will marry, and when she does, I expect she will say good-bye to Withyslea forever. She does not love the old place very much, even now."

"She is in London, is she not?"

"I thought so, but Miss Prew told me this morning that she has gone on to Paris with her aunt, Lady O'More. It is seven weeks since she left home."

"Has the aunt any family?"

"One son, I believe. Why?"

"Oh, I don't know; I only asked for curiosity. Perhaps the son is the reason of her staying away so long."

A shade passes over Lewis's countenance.

"I have thought of that myself; but it would make no difference to me anyway. Come, Anna, let us go into the mater; I must return to my daily toil again, and she will grudge every minute you spend away from her during the short time you are here. Dear old girl! how good it is to *see your face again*."

He kisses her as he says the words, but there is a look of hopeless disappointment in his expression, even whilst he smiles, that makes her eyes fill with tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TERRIBLE DISCLOSURE.

As soon as Lady O'More has May Moriaty safely domiciled in Paris, she throws her disgracefully often (considering her youth and inexperience) in the sole company of her son. It is "neck or nothing" now with her chances of securing her for a daughter-in-law. She cannot *make* Denis propose to the girl, but she knows his inflammable nature, and resolves to afford him every opportunity of being led into doing so. She believes his objections to matrimony to be utterly superficial, and that, if his heart were once engaged, he would scatter them to the winds. So she sends the young people off together, morning after morning, to see cathedrals, and museums, and picture galleries, while she lies at home, exhausted with the hot weather, and expecting each day to see May return, with beaming eyes and a heightened color, to tell her it is all settled, and she and Denis have plighted their troth to one another. Lady O'More is like many another mother—selfish to the backbone—except as regards her offspring. She knows Denis to be unprincipled, careless, and false. She has proved it in too many instances already; yet to secure him a maintenance, and to enable him to lead a steady life (as she weakly imagines marriage will do), she is ready to sacrifice an innocent girl's happiness, for, prejudiced as she may be respecting him, she could not deliberately state her opinion that he is calculated to make a good husband to any woman. But that is a question (*Lady O'More thinks inwardly*) which every girl must *answer for herself*.

One day the whole party have agreed to go by river steamer to St. Cloud, where the annual *kermesse* is being celebrated. But, at the last moment, Lady O'More (as usual) is prostrated by nervous pains, and pronounces herself quite unequal to join in the projected excursion.

"Go with your cousin, me dear child," she says to May; "he knows every step of the way, and will take every care of ye. Ye must take our dear May to the '*Trois Frères*,' Denis, me boy," she continues to her son, "and give her a nice dinner. She will be enchanted with the scene before her. It beats an-nything ye ever saw, me dear; and now, be off with you, and let the poor mother rest; me head feels as if it would break."

Notwithstanding which assertion, my lady leaves her sofa as soon as they are fairly started, and proceeds on a shopping expedition, but, were she detected in the subterfuge, her glib Irish tongue would find a dozen excuses with which to smooth it over.

Denis and May enjoyed the day exceedingly. The weather is beautiful, the river trip most pleasant, and the scene at the *kermesse* entirely novel, at least, to one of them. And the girl is living just then in one of those happy, unsubstantial dreams that we have all passed through in our untroubled youth. If her surroundings were less enjoyable she would still enjoy them. She is with Denis; that is enough for her. As they are proceeding up the river, they run the risk of incurring an accident. The little steamer comes in contact with a barge. There is a collision—a fearful bump—and a sawing, grating, sound. No one knows how much damage is done, nor what may follow it. The passengers get a panic and scream aloud; some of the women even faint. May grows lividly white; she thinks of the terrible fate of the *Princess Alice*, and rises hastily with the rest. But Denis's arm is thrown round her in a moment,

"Sit still, darlin'," he says. "Don't mix with the crowd. Ye might get pushed overboard."

"But, oh ! Denis," she exclaims, with horror-stricken eyes, "there is danger. I am sure there is. The boat is going down. What *shall* we do?"

"An' do ye think I'd let ye drown, May?" he asks, with ineffable tenderness. "Why, I'd drown meself first. You're safe with me, dear. You'd be safe with me all your life, if you'd only trust yourself to me."

All fear leaves the girl's heart at once. She sits down again as her lover desires her, and puts her hand in his.

"Oh ! Denis, you know I will. With whom else could I be happy now?"

"An' ye love me enough to be mine forever, then?"

"Forever and ever," repeats the girl softly.

Denis O'More laughs in a low, satisfied tone to himself.

"We must never part an-ny more, May. If it comes to bolting away from all the old folks, you'd choose me before them, wouldn't you, me darlin'?"

"Yes, yes ! a thousand times over. But why should you talk like that, Denis? My father and mother have no thought but for my happiness, and I don't think dear Aunt Kathleen would make any objection. She has so often told me she wished I was her daughter."

The alarm is over by this time. The river steamer has only had a bad knock, and the old barge has floated away unharmed.

"Perhaps not," replies Denis, who still has his arm about May's waist. "But there's no saying how they may turn round when it comes to the point. I'm not a rich man, darlin', and me uncle may object to me on that score."

"Oh ! I am sure he wouldn't," cries May eagerly.

"Papa has often laughed, and said I can afford to marry a poor man if I wish to do so. Don't think so meanly of *him as that, Denis,*"

"Ah, well, child, let's keep it to ourselves a little longer," replies the young man, with an adoring glance. "Love loses half its charm when the world knows of it. It's the secrecy that makes it so delightful. Isn't it enough for you and me to know it, May?"

"*Quite* enough," she answers fervently, too overwhelmed by the knowledge itself to be able to think of anything else.

But when the delightful day is ended—a day made up of caresses, and flatteries, and passionate glances, which are necessary to the compound which most people term "love"—and May and Denis retrace their steps to Paris, the girl gazes up in his face and whispers,—

"What am I to say to Aunt Kathleen?"

Mr. Denis O'More looks annoyed.

"Why, just nothing, me angel. Haven't we agreed to keep our dear, delicious sacret to ourselves for a little while? Would ye break the compact on the very first day?"

"Oh, no! Denis, but I am afraid she will question me. She often does—in a roundabout way, you know."

"The old lady is inquisitive, is she? But ye must tell her nothing, May. Keep your pretty mouth shut, at all events for a little while. It won't be long, maybe, before all the world knows it, and robs it of half its charm."

"Why should it rob it? What do we care what the world thinks, so long as we are together, Denis?" she answers.

Still, he appears doubtful of her discretion, and lingers about the sitting-room, in a manner very unusual to him, until the ladies separate to dress for the evening.

But Lady O'More is not to be baulked of her inquiries. She is dying to know if anything has transpired during the day's excursion, and makes her way to May's room as soon as she has completed her own toilet.

"*Well, me dear girl,*" she commences, as she sits down

by the dressing-table, "and so ye enjoyed your day at St. Cloud."

"Oh, awfully, aunt," stammers May, who dreads the next question that may be put to her. "The *kermesse* is a lovely sight. I shall never forget it. I bought no end of presents for papa and mamma."

"An' was Denis good to ye, now?"

"Very good, aunt."

"Did ye have the time for an-ny talk together?"

"Oh, yes."

"An' what did ye talk about?"

"Heaps of things. Cousin Denis knows so much more than I do. He has quite a fund of information of all sorts."

"Oh, fie, now. Ye don't mean to tell me that when a good-looking boy like Denis takes out such a pretty girl as you, he does nothing but give ye information all day. Sure he said something sweeter than that, or I'll disown him for a degenerate son." May crimsoned, but answers nothing. "Ye won't tell, ye little hussy? Then ye'll make me believe it all the more."

"Oh, no, Aunt Kathleen; indeed, there is nothing to tell. What should he say to me? We are very good friends—that is all."

"May, tell me the truth now. Have ye refused me boy?"

"No, Aunt Kathleen."

"An' has he proposed to ye?"

"I wish you wouldn't ask me. You have been so kind to me, I hate to refuse to tell you anything, only—only—Denis doesn't wish me to speak about it just yet," replies the poor girl, with scarlet cheeks.

"Then it's all right, and that's enough!" exclaims Lady O'More, rising to her feet with a beaming face.

"Aunt Kathleen, you will not mention it again? He *will never forgive me*," cries May entreatingly.

'I'll be silent as the grave, child, though I'd like to set

all the bells of Paris ringing. Come, give me a kiss in token of it. You're me own child now (or ye soon will be), and ye must just look on me as your mother.

May is ready enough to accept the effusive embrace that follows Lady O'Mores' speech, and passes the remainder of the evening in a blissful dream of the coming by-and-by. Denis has another delightful interview with her on the moonlit balcony before they separate for the night, during which he reiterates his protestations of affection, and she retires to rest, blissfully certain that her future is secured. For there have been moments during her acquaintanceship with her cousin when the world has looked very black to Mary Moriaty, and she has felt tremulously afraid lest she had made a terrible mistake in placing dependence on his word. But all this is right now. Denis has spoken out plainly at last with regard to his intentions and before she returns to her parents, the matter will of course be formally settled between them. May thinks with a happy smile, that their "delicious sacret" (as Denis pronounces it, with his delightful touch of brogue) cannot be kept so for more than two or three weeks longer, and falls to sleep, repeating the words to herself in which she shall announce the news to her father and mother. She is up again and dressed before her usual time. Sorrow keeps us waking far on in the night, but joy rouses us early in the morning, and May is unable to sleep long. She wants to look her new prospects again in the face. She dresses herself daintily in a white-flowered muslin that Denis has admired, and stands before the mirror, twisting snoods of purple, and blue, and green ribbon in her sunny hair, and wondering which shall become her best. Whilst she is still undecided, the *facteur* arrives, and the *fille de quartier* taps at her door with a letter. May recognizes the English postage stamp, and concludes it comes from Withyslea. But a second glance shows her she is mistaken. The *handwriting is strange* to her. This rouses her curiosity.

She throws down her brush, and comb, and ribbons, and, seating herself, proceeds to break the seal and read the epistle. The first words make her stare; at the next, she grows red and white by turns, and, when she reaches the conclusion, she lets the paper drop upon the floor, and bursts into a flood of tears. There it lies for some minutes, whilst May sobs and chokes, and dries her streaming eyes, and sobs again. But, as she becomes exhausted, she becomes incredulous. It is a falsehood. Some one is jealous of her exceeding happiness. It *cannot* be true. She picks up the crumpled letter, and smooths it out, and reads it over again. Let us read it with her.

“5 MABEL GROVE, WALHAM GREEN.”

“MISS MORIATY,

“MADAM,—As a cruel rumor is going about town that you are about to marry your cousin, Mr. Denis O'More, I write to warn you that he is a married man. Two years ago he married me at the registrar's office in Hammer-smith. My name was Emily Sheppard, and he met me when I was an assistant at Madame Vertue's, in Regent Street. He has promised me again and again that he will disclose the secret of our marriage to his mother, and I have been very patient with him. But when I hear he is going to marry an heiress, and he does not write to me, or come to see me for months together, I think it is time I should speak for myself. I got this address from the caretaker at his mother's house, and I trust the letter will reach you. Please show it to my husband, and ask him to deny it if he can. His mother and all the world must know it now. Hoping this shameful rumor is not true, for I don't like to think so badly of him,—I am, Madam, yours respectfully,

“EMILY O'MORE.”

When we receive a great shock of this kind, it is a

long time before we can thoroughly understand what we have heard. We read the words over and over again, and they strike upon our brain like tinkling brass on a sounding cymbal, making no real impression. Upon a second perusal, when her tears have partly washed the first shock away, May feels *sure* that this terrible story *cannot* be true, and it would be ridiculous to trouble herself about it. Yet she feels that she cannot see anybody until she has received the confirmation of her belief from Denis's lips. *Denis's lips!* As she remembers the protestations of fidelity they have sworn to her, and the kisses of affection they have bestowed, she is ready to cry aloud against the wicked slanderer who has attempted to come between them and cut their happy love in two with such a lie. Yet her lip trembles, and the tears continue to gush from her eyes and run down her cheeks, and she feels too giddy to stand, and is obliged to sit down and rest her head upon her hand. She sends a little note, scribbled in pencil, to Lady O'More at about twelve o'clock, saying she is overtired, and asking her to excuse her presence at the *déjeuner* and another to Denis, asking to speak to him in the boudoir next her room as soon as he is at liberty. She does not know what else to do—poor child. An older woman would peremptorily have summoned her lover to her presence, and demanded to learn the value of the communication she has received before he had either eaten or drank. But May is too young—too inexperienced—and too shy to command. Only a fierce fear which is almost certainty is knocking at her heart, and she is incapable of doing anything but wait until the cruel riddle is explained to her.

"You let that poor child overtire herself yesterday, Denis!" exclaims Lady O'More, as she peruses her communication, "and now she is unable to come down to *déjeuner*. And you have a note too?" Does she say the *same thing to you?*"

"Not at all," replies Denis, with a self-conscious smile, "this is a *rendezvous*, mother. Me cousin wishes to see me in the boudoir as soon as I've finished me breakfast."

"Ah, go along! You're a pair of sly boots," cries his mother, laughing; "and May's fatigue is all a ruse to get you up there by yourself. You two are keeping something from me, I'm sure of that, but I'll find it out before the day's over, Denis, and that ye may depend on."

Denis doesn't look over-pleased at his mother's pleasantry.

"Take care you don't find a hornet's nest," he says, "and sting your fingers with it. I suppose the little lady only wants to see me about the afternoon plans," he continues, as, having made a light meal, he rises from table, "an' I'll be back directly, mother."

"Ah, child, take your time over it," she rejoins. "Ye can't deceive me. I've been young meself, though ye mayn't believe it, and I'll warrant that May will find something more to say to ye than about the plans for this afternoon."

If Lady O'More only knew *how* much more May has to say to him, her lively tongue would cease its cackle. The girl is in the boudoir as the young man enters it. With a face almost as white as her dress, she is standing by the centre-table, with the fatal letter in her hand.

"Why, what is the matter, me own darlin'?" cries Denis O'More, as he catches sight of her. "Ye look quite pale," and he takes her in his arms as he speaks, and kisses her fondly.

The contact, the pressure, overcome May. She has been suffering such agonies of suspense, and now, in the sunshine of his presence, and under the assurance of his loving words, all the trouble seems to melt away, and she bursts into a flood of excited tears.

"Oh, Denis!" she exclaims, kissing him back again, "I have been so miserable, but I am sure it isn't true,

It *cannot* be true ! But who can be so wicked as to have written it ? ”

“ You’re talking in mysteries to me, me angel ! ” returns her lover. “ What has distressed you ? Tell your Denis, and he’ll make it all right in two minutes. ”

“ Yes ! Yes ! I feel you will. It is in this horrid letter. Read it, Denis ! ”

“ An’ so I will, if you’ll kiss me again before I begin work. There, that’s it ! Now, sit on my knee, darlin’, or I won’t be able to read a blessed word. ”

He seats himself, and pulls her down on his lap, and May feels almost happy again, until she sees his eyes fall on the address of the letter she has put into his hand. Then he starts and scowls, and with an oath drags forth the contents of the envelope, and commences reading them. May has her eyes fixed on him earnestly all the while. She notes his color fade, his teeth clench themselves together, a glare of angry resentment overspread his face, and her confidence weakens in proportion.

“ Well ? ” she demands, in an altered voice, as he finishes its perusal. He looks up and catches her inquiring eye.

“ Well ? ” he echoes, trying to speak unconcernedly. “ It is as you suppose, May, an impudent libel ! Probably the writer thought you would send her money to stop her tongue. ”

But, young and ingenuous as Mary Moriarty may be, she is not a fool, and she knows that the trembling of Denis O’More’s hand, and the fixed, strained look on his countenance, and the shifty glance of his eye (like that of a man who is trying to find a means of escape), denote that he knows more about the letter she has received than he chooses to tell. She jumps off his knee in a moment, and confronts him.

“ Denis, you are keeping something back from me, ”

she says. "You know who wrote that letter. I am sure of it."

"Oh! that's likely enough, me darlin'. A man about town knows hundreds of people of whom he says nothing at home."

"Then has she—has she any grounds for saying what she does?" gasps May.

"An-ny grounds? Of course not! She's an impudent hussy. Just tear up her letter and forget it."

"*Forget it!* How can I forget it? *I*—who am to be your wife? You see, she makes no secret of her address. You must let me write and obtain proofs of her falsehood, or I shall have no rest."

Denis O'More becomes alarmed.

"*Write to her!* Oh, no! Ye mustn't do that. Ye must take no notice of it at all, and *I* will take care it doesn't happen again."

May stares at him in unmitigated astonishment.

"But you must be laughing at me, Denis. I receive a letter to tell me you are a married man—*I*, whom you have asked to be your wife, and you say, take no notice of it. It is impossible. You must swear to me that letter is false, and then you must come with me straight and tell your mother we are to be married, and consult with her how we can punish this horrible woman who dares to insult me."

"Ah, but ye don't know me mother. I can't do that," replies Denis uneasily.

May rounds on him with all the indignation of an honest English girl.

"You can't tell Aunt Kathleen that we are engaged? What do you mean? How can we keep it a secret? *My* mother must know, whatever you do with regard to *yours*."

"*Now May, me darlin', listen to me. Come and sit*

on me knee again, and put your pretty arms around me neck, and I'll tell ye all."

"No, no, I will not come near till I know the truth. Tell me *the truth*, Denis. I can bear anything better than this suspense."

"Well, then, the truth is that I love ye, and I won't give ye up for an-nybody."

"But this woman—who is she? How dare she say she is your wife?"

"Because—well, ye know so little of men, it's difficult to tell ye, May—but she's a divil that led me into a scrape years ago, and made me the unhappy man I am. An' that's the whole truth, since ye say ye want it."

"Do you mean you are married to her?" asks May, in a strangely altered voice.

"She inveigled me into it, curse her."

"She is your wife, then?"

"Why do you keep on forcing the bitter truth down a man's throat when he's doing all in his power to forget it?" he exclaims angrily. "It was a fatal mistake on my part, but it's over. I haven't lived with her for the last year, and I never mean to live with her again. I have no money, so it's useless her going to law about the matter, and there let it die. But I'll be even with her for making it known to you."

"But if this is the truth, how can you marry me?" Why did you ask me?" cries the girl, in a mystified tone.

"I never asked ye, May. Your wish was father to the thought. I promised to love ye all my life, and I'm ready to do it. But as for marriage, why, you see how I'm tied already, and Heaven knows 't isn't much of a happiness to offer to an-ny woman. We'll be better without it, for it only brings trouble and misery in its train."

He approaches and tries to embrace her as he speaks, but she *pushes him* vehemently away. Some remembrance that *blanches* her cheek, and makes the beating of

her heart audible, has suddenly come over her, and transformed her from a breathing woman to a statue.

"Come darlin'," he says coaxingly, "don't turn against your own Denis."

"Go away," she says between her teeth. "don't touch me. *I hate you.*"

The young Irishman looks astonished at his rebuff. "An' this is the way you speak to the man that you've sworn ye love with all your heart?" he says.

"I *did* love you—fondly, and you know it. But you have deceived me."

"Ah, never. When did ye ask me a wur-rud about an-ny other woman? You're very innocent, but you couldn't believe you were quite the first, May."

"But you are—*married*!"

"Bad luck to it! But don't speak so loud, May, or me mother might hear you, and I couldn't have her know it for all the wur-ruld. 'Twould be the ruin of me. An' now, let me tell ye the whole story. I met this girl by accident, and just got up a little flirtation with her, and it would never have been an-nything else if she and her confounded old mother hadn't taken the advantage of me one day, and threatened me with the law, and the priest, and the saints know what beside, unless I went to church with her. And so, to silence them, I did, an I've regretted it ever since. I might have married a fortune more than once since that time, but my bad luck stood in my way. But I thought I had found my consolation in you, me darlin', and that your love would make up to me for all other misfortunes."

"*You thought!*" echoes May contemptuously; "yes, you have thought of yourself all along, but never of me. What is to become of me after this?"

"What would become of ye? I love ye all the same. *What difference* does it make to us? I tell ye I never *shall live with that woman any more.*"

"Are you mad?" cries May. "Do you suppose I can ever look on you in the same light again? You—a married man! You must think little of me, indeed!"

"An' you'll desert me?" exclaims the young man, in real distress. "You'll give me up. Oh, May! I didn't think it of ye."

"What can I do? what can I do?" sobs the girl, with her face buried in her hands. "You have spoilt my life, Denis!"

"Ah, no, it's not so bad as that, surely! This can't change our hearts, May. We will love each other all the same."

"Never! I will go back to my parents at once. I never wish to see your face again!"

"But ye won't betray me, May! *Promise* ye won't betray me to me mother! I'm dependent on her, ye see, darlin', and a word from you might send me adrift on the wor-ruld. The mother can be terrible if she's crossed. You would never be so cruel as to bring her anger down upon me?"

"I shall not mention your name if I can help it, but I must go home."

"An' what excuse will ye make?" demands her cousin, anxious only for his own exemption from blame.

"I shall say I am ill—home-sick—anything! What does it matter? Only I cannot stay in Paris."

"An' ye won't say that I have had an-nything to do with your determination? For me mother is sure to question you. I doubt if she will let you go. She has set her heart on our marrying each other."

"I know she has, poor Aunt Kathleen! If she hadn't, and if I had thought you were so untrue, I should never have been weak enough to encourage you. Oh, Denis," cries the girl, suddenly breaking down again, "how base you have been to me!"

"*Not at all, darlin'!* If you knew a little more of the

wor-ruld, ye wouldn't take it to heart like this. We've had a very pleasant time together, and it'll be a pleasant memory to our lives' end. If it had resulted in marriage, we might have been very sorry for it. An' ye'll say nothing to me mother now?"

"Nothing! I have promised that already. But please go away and leave me. I wish to be alone!"

"An' you won't kiss me and make it up before I go?"

"No, no! Don't come near me. You have done enough harm already!"

"Ah, May, ye'll kiss your own Denis now," he urges, bending over her. But all the answer she vouchsafes him is to turn away and rush into her bedroom, and slam the door after her.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "YOUNG PERSON."

DENIS O'MORE feels rather foolish as he finds himself alone. He twirls his moustache, and wonders what he shall say to his mother about the affair. He feels sure that Mary Moriarty will try to keep her promise to him. But unless Lady O'More is persuaded not to question her, he is afraid the whole story may be blurted out against her will. She is so honest, and fearless, and child-like—so incapable of guarding a secret when opposed to a woman like her Aunt Kathleen. So, after some cogitation, he determines to be beforehand with her. He must face the truth. May knows his secret, and she is going home, indignant and angry with him for having deceived her. It is a terrible termination to all his plans, but perhaps it is for the best. He has felt himself getting into an *inextricable tangle lately*, and has often wondered how it would *all end*. Now it is ended, and his first effort must be to in-

duce his mother to let Mary Moriarty return home without too much questioning. And to that end, he descends with a mournful countenance to the *salon*, where Lady O'More is amusing herself with a Tauchnitz novel.

"Well, me boy," she says inquiringly, as he enters, "and what's your luck this morning?"

"Just as bad as it can be," he answers gloomily, as he sits down beside her. "You've often hinted to me, mother, that ye wished me to make up to Mary Moriarty; haven't ye, now?"

"An' indeed I have, for she'll be an excellent match for ye, Denis. An' you've followed my instructions pretty closely, if I've an-ny eyes in my head."

"I've been trying to please you, as I hope always to do; but some girls don't seem to know their own minds. If I tell you a sa-cret, mother, will you keep it faithfully?"

"Of course I will. Have I ever failed ye yet, Denis?"

"Will ye swear by the Blessed Virgin not to mention it to a soul, and especially to me cousin Mary?"

"I will, me boy."

"Well then, the devil's in it, but I offered her marriage, this morning, and she's refused me."

Lady O'More nearly jumps out of her chair.

"*She's refused ye!* I can't believe it. The girl dotes on ye. You're mistaken, Denis, if ever a man was. Why, May has confessed to me that she wants to marry you."

"Ah, mother! ye don't half know the cunning of women when they are anxious to put ye off the scent. They're like hares doubling to their forms. She only wanted to put ye on the wrong tack."

"But I won't be insulted by a chit like that. I'll speak to her."

"Stop, mother. You've sworn on the Blessed Virgin you'll hold your tongue."

"Ah, Denis! but ye shouldn't have bound me down like that. The girl's been lying to me."

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"Never mind. Perhaps you mistook her meaning. An-ny way, she has refused to marry me ; an' she spoke so nicely on the subject I can't blame her. There's another man in the wind, mother ; that's the way the land lies. Me cousin made me promise not to mention it to an-ny one ; but how can I keep an-nything from you, and especially as I want you to let the poor child go home quietly, and without any questioning."

"May is going home ! What, directly ?"

"Yes ; she insists upon returning to Withyslea, and you must let her go. She has been crying her heart out over my disappointment, and won't stay to witness it ; so she says."

"Ah ! but that is a mistake, Denis. She may have passed her word to some other man, but she loves *you*, I'll take my oath of it. Keep her here and let me talk to her. We'll find a way out of the engagement (if there is one), and then ye'll both be happy."

"Mother, you are altogether wrong," exclaims Denis, who is beginning to grow uneasy at the extent of her zeal. "May has told me the whole story. She loves me as a brother, and you as a mother and is distressed to refuse my hand, but her heart is elsewhere. Now, I wouldn't have told you this except for her sake. Don't, pray, let us have any scenes. Let me cousin arrange her own plans entirely, and carry them out without teasing her for the reason. She'll give you a good one, never fear. And now, mother, remember you've *promised*."

"I won't forget, Denis ; but it's all very provoking and disappointing. D'ye suppose I would have kept Mary Moriarty with us for three months past if I had thought it would end like this ? I made sure'twould be a match between ye. Dear, dear ! how provokingly things do turn out."

"*Here comes Susanne*," exclaims Denis. "Perhaps *she has a message for you*."

"Mademoiselle's compliments," says the waiting-maid in French, "and she will like to see miladi upstairs when it shall be convenient to her."

"There, mother, I told ye it would be so," whispered Denis. "An' now, whatever ye do, remember your promise."

Lady O'More (with something very like a tear of disappointment in her eye) trails languidly upstairs, and taps at May's bedroom door. On being admitted, she finds the girl's trunks open, and the bed piled with the various articles of clothing she is about to pack in them.

"Why, me dear child!" she exclaims, with well-feigned surprise, "what is the meaning of this?"

May is very pale, and her face bears the impress of the emotion she has passed through, but she has stopped crying and feels as if she should never cry again. Yet she is anxious to conciliate her Aunt Kathleen, who has been seemingly very kind to her, although it was in reality put on to compass her own ends.

"Oh, aunt!" she replies, in a weary voice, "I hope you won't think me troublesome or unkind, but I have had bad news, and I must go home."

"Bad news, me darlin'? What sort of news? Surely me brother is not ill?"

"Oh, no! They are all well in Withyslea, thank Heaven! But—but I have been a little upset this morning, and—and I don't feel very well, and I have been so long away, I think my parents must want me back again," falters May.

"An' ye wish to go at once? Why, this is very sudden! Are ye packing your things already?"

"Yes; I thought it best to do so, in case you consent to my leaving by to-night's mail. *Do* let me go, dear Aunt Kathleen! I have trespassed for a long time on your *hospitality*, and I have been very happy—very happy. *indeed*," repeats poor May brokenly; "but father and

mother want me now, and I feel I must go. Cannot I start for Calais this evening?"

"Well, of course you can, me dear, if it's absolutely necessary, but it is impossible for ye to travel alone. I cannot give up these rooms for another fortnight, but your Cousin Denis can take ye across the water, and deliver ye safe into your father's hands."

"Oh, no, no!" cries May, shrinking backward. "I don't wish it. I could not trouble him. Papa would not like my travelling with a gentleman."

Lady O'More's affectionate manner changes directly. She sees, from her niece's undoubted dislike to the mention of her cousin, that it is to avoid *him* she wishes to leave her guardianship. Denis must have told her the truth then. She has refused him. She is a coquette, who has been ready to amuse herself by flirting until the game reached a certain point, when she remembered for the first time her obligations elsewhere. And she has looked so pure and innocent all the while. Lady O'More couldn't have believed it of her. But, believing it, she becomes cold, if not stern.

"Oh, very well, me dear. I am sure me son has no wish to trouble ye. He has plenty of other things to do besides dancing attendance on young ladies. I will send me maid with ye. I will be able to do without her when you're gone, and she can stay and look after me house till I return. I will go and tell her to prepare to start this evening."

"Oh, Aunt Kathleen," says May, in a choking voice, "you are angry with me. I feel sure of it, and I cannot tell you my reason for going away so suddenly; but do believe me when I say it is from no want of gratitude to you."

"Ye needn't make an-ny excuses, me dear. I have no *right to detain ye from your father and mother, and if ye*

have made up your mind to return to them, that is enough. Can ye manage your packing without assistance?"

"Yes, aunt," replies May, with a low sob.

"No one is saying 'nay' to ye, and so I can't see the reason of your crying," says Lady O'More coldly. "We've done our best to make ye happy, but, doubtless, we've not been able to give ye the luxuries of Withyslea. Me Denis is a poor man. He has all the beauty and the talents of the Moriats, but he hasn't a fortune—worse luck!—or he'd have been picked up long ago. There's many a girl would be glad and proud to have him, if he had only the means to keep her. That's his misfortune, poor darling, and not his fault. But some people set such store by their money, they think it will buy the wur-ruld."

As this exordium is Greek to Mary Moriarty, she does not answer it, except by saying that she has had everything she could possibly desire whilst staying with her aunt, and spent the happiest and gayest time of all her life.

"Withyslea will seem so quiet and dull after it, that I sha'n't know what to do with my time," she concludes, with a quivering lip.

"An' yet you want to leave us!" exclaims Lady O'More, with reviving hope. "Now, me dear child, isn't this sudden resolution a little bit of a mistake on your part, and won't ye be sorry for it when it's over?"

May shakes her head.

"No, dear Aunt Kathleen. You don't understand me, and I can't explain myself. I would stay with you all my life if I could, but—but—it is impossible. My place and my duty lie at home, and the longer I remain here the harder it might become to return to them. Pray let me go at once. I know from my mother's letters how much she misses me, and—and—the sooner my visit here is ended the better."

"There's some young gentleman, doubtless, in Withyslea

who's pining for your return," replies her aunt, with ill-concealed sarcasm. "Girls don't fret after their fathers and mothers so much as all that, May. You've left a lover behind ye—haven't ye, now?" May grows crimson, but answers nothing. "Ah, well," says Lady O'More, with a sigh, as she prepares to depart, "very few young people know what is best for them, but I thought ye were an exception to the rule. An-ny way, Jane will be ready to start with ye by the eight o'clock train this evening, and I'll go and send a telegram to your father to say you are coming. Don't let me brother Dan blame *me* in this matter, Mary Moriaty, for it's none of *my* doing that ye leave us, remember."

"Oh, no, dear Aunt Kathleen. It is my own wish entirely, and both father and mother shall know it," replies May sadly.

The poor child is so miserable she hardly knows how she gets through the remainder of the day, but her great anxiety being to keep her promise to her cousin, and shield him from his mother's anger, she makes her packing a plea for remaining upstairs, and sees neither of them again until it is almost time to start. Then Denis O'More is ashamed to meet her eye, and keeps in the background, and his mother is cold and distant, and scarcely brushes her niece's face with her lips as she bids her good-bye. May is pale with grief and excitement, but feverishly anxious to be off, and out of the sight of her aunt's reproachful glances and Denis's ill-concealed fear. She hurries through the constrained farewells, and arrives at the station long before the mail train is ready to start. But once fairly on her way home, she astonishes and terrifies the maid, who is travelling in charge of her, with the vehemence of her emotion and regret. She passes from one flood of tears into another, until she has exhausted herself. But sleep *does not visit her eyes*, either in the train or the boat, and *she reaches Withyslea* the following afternoon in a condi-

tion of prostration that fills her parents with the utmost alarm. Meanwhile, Lady O'More is worrying her son about the matter to an alarming extent. She cannot understand any girl refusing to marry such a handsome, distinguished-looking creature as Denis, and firmly believes he must have made some great mistake in his manner of proposing to her, or she never would have been so foolish as to reject him.

"An' now tell me, Denis," she says, in her fretful voice, for about the twentieth time. "What did ye say to her to frighten her away from us so suddenly? Was it the money do ye think? and can me brother Dan have cautioned her against an-ny one marrying her for her fortune? Or is she such a baby that she is afraid to accept an offer without asking leave of her parents?"

"I've told ye half a hundred times that there's another man in the field, mother. If May is not engaged already, she's on the point of being so. Why will ye worry me with such questions? The thing is done. I have had my answer, and now, let us drop the matter."

"Ah, well, if ye won't follow it up, I can't make ye, Denis. But if ye were half a man, ye would propose a visit to Withyslea for the autumn. Me brother couldn't refuse ye, after Mary being here so long, and girls like a boy that shows pluck and perseverance, and won't take 'No' for an answer. But I don't think the men are made of the same stuff they were when I was a girl. They're chicken-hearted by comparison. I remember, when your father came courting me, there were twenty boys in Dublin that wouldn't give place to him, though he had my plighted word, and it was through free fights and broken heads he fought his way to the altar. And that's, I believe, why I took him. I'm sure it wasn't for his fortune, for I had many a richer suitor that would have left you and me better off, my poor Denis, than we are now. But the

young men of to-day don't think so much of women as they did in that time."

"Well, we're not in the wilds of Ireland, mother—that's one reason, and the fashion's gone out—that's another."

"But the fashion of money hasn't gone out, Denis, and we're getting poorer instead of richer every year. Potter only sent me two hundred pounds this quarter. How will we live on a sum like that? I hoped, if you and May Moriarty had made a match of it, me brother would have come down with something handsome, but, as you've failed to please her, you must look out for some one you *can* please me boy, or I shall have to give up the house and go into lodgings."

Denis O'More is down in his luck. He is honestly "cut up" about losing May, although (morally speaking) he has no business to be so, and he is dreadfully afraid of what his neglected wife may do in her indignation and revenge. He has dispatched a letter full of lies to her, as a sop for Cerberus, declaring her fears to be unfounded, and threatening her with a total disappearance, if she attempts again to break the contract of secrecy she has entered into with him. But still he feels very uneasy, and his mother's constant "badgering" about a lucrative marriage is more than he can bear.

"Look here, mother!" he says, as he stands before her, gnawing his moustache, "if you worry me any more on this subject, I will go and enlist for a soldier! I can't stand it an-ny longer. I've done your bidding, and made love to Mary Moriarty—the best of love, Heaven knows,—and it isn't me fault if she won't respond. But I can't do more than try to please ye, and I've burned me fingers pretty well in the trying, I can tell ye. An' so, now, you must let me rest a little and recover meself, for *there's no more love left in me for the present, and that's the truth if I never speak again.*"

"Ah, well, me boy, I can't believe ye went about it

the right way, or she'd never have had the heart to refuse ye. However, if you've scorched yourself over the business, and don't feel like trying your luck again just yet, you must look out for some work, Denis, for I've pretty well come to the end of me tether, and it isn't fair in ye to ask me to keep ye, when ye don't bring in so much as a brass farthing toward the week's expenses."

Such arguments are apt to produce unpleasantness between the fondest mother and son, and the rest of the O'Mores' stay in Paris passes dully enough. Lady O'More had engaged more expensive apartments than she would otherwise have done on account of Mary Moriaty, and the great results she anticipated from her visit to them, and now all her anxiety is to give them up again. She grumbles, and laments, and reproaches for the rest of the term, and Denis is secretly delighted when the day arrives for their return to London. It is not a nice time of the year to come back again. July and August have baked every brick in the old town till it feels like a huge oven. The trees are beginning to droop and languish, and the grass in the parks is burned brown. It is the greatest mistake to leave town in the middle of the season, and return in September. Much better to bear the heat until the bitter end, and then fly away until the oven has become cool. But with too many people necessity knows no law, and it is so in the present instance. The funds are exhausted, and Lady O'More must return to the house at the top of Baker Street. If she only knew—if her son only knew—the Nemesis that awaits them there! They reach London at about twelve o'clock on a boiling close day at the end of August, sufficient in itself to make them both irascible, and discontented. The servants have been apprised of their intended arrival, and the house is ready to receive them. Only, as Jane meets her mistress *in the hall, and relieves her of some of her encumbrances, she whispers,—*

"If you please, my lady, there's a young person waiting to see you in the drawing-room."

Denis is busy meanwhile disputing the fare with the cabman who has brought them from Victoria, and is not aware of what is going on inside.

"*A young person*," repeats Lady O'More, in a tone of annoyance. "What does she want with me? What made you let her in? You knew I would not like to be worried with strangers directly I arrive."

"That's just what I said, my lady, but she was so very importunate, she would not go. She quite *forced* her way upstairs, and said her business was of great importance, and she should wait till you arrived."

"Extremely impertinent," exclaims Lady O'More. "However, I'll go and dismiss her at once, and tell cook, Jane, to send up my luncheon to my room, for I am so tired I shall go straight to sleep."

No, you won't, my lady. There is some one waiting for you upstairs who will rob you of rest for many days to come. When Lady O'More enters the drawing-room, and sees a pert-looking but pretty young woman seated in her best arm-chair, she is disposed to be very haughty and imperious.

"And pray, may I ask?" she says, with a grandiloquent air, "who you are, and what is your business here?"

"Oh, certainly, my lady," replies the young person promptly, but without rising from her seat. "My name is Mrs. Denis O'More, and I have come here to speak to my husband."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE DARKNESS,

It is late at night—that is, for Withyslea—perhaps about ten o'clock—and Lewis Vangel and his mother are in the sitting-room of their little cottage. Anna has long since left them to return to her hospital duties, and Mary Moriarty has been at the Manor House for three days past, but no one in the village has seen her yet. Lewis is writing an article for a medical paper, and Mrs. Vangel has hitherto sat beside him, using her needle in silence. But now she lays down her work, and commences to move about the room and fidget him, and he wishes she would go to bed.

“What time is it?” he asks, lying back in his chair and yawning, but his mother returns no answer. Looking round, he perceives she is standing at the open window gazing out as though she saw something amidst the blackness of the summer shrubs and the thick hedge of privet that surrounds their little garden.

“Hullo, what can you see there?” he asks laughingly, for Mrs. Vangel’s eyesight is failing her fast, even by daylight.

“Lewis,” she replies in a low voice, turning to confront him, “it is very strange, but I could almost declare I saw a woman’s figure come into the gate just now, and retreat again.”

“Some one in want of medicine, perhaps,” replies her son carelessly, as he takes up his pen again.

“Now, Lewis, is it likely? Your patients know the

surgery too well. They would walk up to the side door and knock."

"Some one mistook our gate for the Allens' then."

"I don't think so. I believe it was Mrs. Moriatty. It looked just like her figure."

Lewis laughs again, though uneasily, for the name Moriatty always brings a pang to him with it.

"My dear old mother, you are all in the clouds to-night. *Mrs. Moriatty!* What an idea. What on earth should Mrs. Moriatty be walking about Withyslea for at this time of night, and especially hanging around our wicket? You have sat up too long, old lady. You are dreaming."

Mrs. Vangel is inclined to be a little nettled at her son's jesting manner.

"You may laugh, Lewis, but it is the truth. And I don't see anything so extraordinary in it. Some one may be ill at the Manor House. Rachel Newham told me that Miss Moriatty is quite knocked up by the gayety she has been going through, and is unable to see any one."

"If Miss Moriatty requires my assistance, they would send a servant to tell me so," replies Lewis, bending over his work; "and even if Mrs. Moriatty came herself, she would walk straight up to the house, and not hang about the garden. Come, dear mother, it is past your usual bedtime, and I have a lot of writing to finish this evening. When are you going to let me do it?"

"Well, Lewis, that is a pretty broad hint, so I won't wait for a second," says Mrs. Vangel smiling, as she kisses him, and wishes him good-night. He lights her bedroom candle, and opens the door for her to pass through, and doesn't close it till she has reached the turning of the stairs, and then he returns to his work, and is quickly absorbed in the subject he is treating of. Presently his attention is attracted by a rustle outside the open window, as though *some garment* brushed the branches on either side the narrow path. He thinks of his mother's fancy, and, rising,

goes to the casement and peers curiously out. Actually, there *is* some one standing beneath the sill.

"Who are you?" he exclaims, "and what do you want?"

The answer comes back in a breathless whisper.

"Are you quite alone, Doctor Vangel? Can I speak to you undisturbed?"

Lewis's self-control stands him in good stead now. To his astonishment it *is* the voice of Mrs. Moriatty, and she is there alone, and in the darkness. He has no time to wonder at the reason of her visit. He can only whisper back again,—

"Yes, I am quite alone. Wait a minute and I will unfasten the front door for you."

He goes softly into the passage and withdraws the bolt, and finds her waiting on the step outside.

"If your business with me is of importance," he whispers to her, "you had better come straight into the surgery, where nothing we say can be overheard."

She bows her head in reply, and Lewis leads her through the room he has just quitted, and by another door down a low flight of steps, that takes them into his surgery. It is a very small place, smelling evilly of rhubarb and magnesia, and senna and salts, and provided with a table and half-a-dozen chairs, and as many shelves of jars and bottles. Lewis locks the communicating door behind them, and, having placed Mrs. Moriatty in a chair, he takes another beside her, and turns up the lamp.

"And now," he says softly, "what can I do for you, Mrs. Moriatty?"

She turns her face towards him, and he is shocked at her appearance. Her eyes are swollen, her cheeks are stained by tears, the usually placid and contented-looking matron is transformed into a creature full of grief and fear.

"My dear friend," cries the young doctor, as he catches

sight of her swollen features, "what on earth is the matter? Is your daughter ill? What misfortune has brought you here at this time of night?"

All the answer she gives him is conveyed by throwing her head down on the surgery table, and bursting into a flood of tears. The ruling passion rises uppermost. Lewis does not attempt to console her, but, rising, he mixes a dose of sal volatile and water, and holds it to her lips, Mrs. Moriaty drinks it without remonstrance, and is able, after a while, to check the violence of her emotion. But when she lifts her head again, and looks at Lewis Vangel, she sees that his face is very white and drawn.

"Have I alarmed you?" she asks him, with a sob.

"You have, Mrs. Moriaty. It is so unusual for you to give way to any emotion. I have never seen you otherwise than looking happy and prosperous. Your condition fills me with all sorts of fear."

"Oh, Doctor Vangel! My daughter! My darling May! They have killed her between them."

"What *do* you mean?"

"I dare not tell her father. I dare not mention it to her. I scarcely dare breathe it to myself, but something is terribly wrong. My heart has been breaking all day with a vague, wretched fear of evil, and, as Mr. Moriaty is not well, and has retired for the night, I put on my bonnet and ran down here to speak to you."

"You were in the garden before I saw you, were you not?"

"Yes. I had entered the gate, but I saw your mother at the window, so I drew back again till she should be gone. I would not have her know it for all the world. Why is it that I feel I can confide to you (so young as you are, and a man into the bargain) what I could not possibly say before Mrs. Vangel?"

"*Perhaps it is because I am a doctor.*"

"*Perhaps; but not entirely.* There is something in you

which makes me feel so *safe*. I know you to be so good and true, that I would put my girl's salvation in your hands without compunction or fear."

"You are very good to say so, Mrs. Moriatty, but what is it about her that alarms you?"

"Everything! Everything! Oh, Doctor Vangel, she has come back to us a perfect wreck. She is not the same girl that she was. You remember the sweet, innocent face she had, that blushed at the least thing, and was always lighted by a smile? It is all gone; I feel as if she would never be herself again."

"Oh, that is a fancy, Mrs. Moriatty, born of your motherly anxiety. I daresay she is overwrought by the gayety she has gone through, and the late hours she had kept. Her nervous system wants rehabilitation. She is not used to dissipation; country air and rest will soon set her right again."

"Indeed, you are mistaken, Lewis. (May I call you Lewis? I feel as if I were coming to a son to help and advise me.)"

"I shall only feel too much honored by your using my Christian name," he replies, coloring with pleasure.

"Well then, you must know May returned home quite unexpectedly. We did not think her aunt would leave Paris for another fortnight or three weeks; but last Tuesday we received a telegram to say she would start the same evening, and on Wednesday afternoon she reached home. Of course Mr. Moriatty and I went to Leaton to meet her. Oh, Lewis! when she got out of the railway carriage, you might have knocked me down with a feather. She looked like the ghost of herself; but that's nothing!" that's nothing! cries Mrs. Moriatty, relapsing into tears, "compared with what has happened since."

"Is Miss Moriatty *ill*, then?"

"Lewis," says the mother solemnly, "she is mad! I don't know what to make of her; something terrible must

have happened during her absence from home. She is not the same creature ; she seems to shrink from her father and me as if we should poison her. She will not speak of her visit, nor of her aunt and cousin, but sits all day idle and silent, with her hands folded in her lap. But it's the nights that alarm me so dreadfully. I have watched beside her bed since she returned home, and she frightens me beyond measure with her raving. Oh, what can it all mean—what *can* it mean ?”

Lewis sits silent and oppressed. He thinks he can guess what it means, and the knowledge is naturally painful. His poor sweetheart is suffering the same pangs for some other man that he has suffered on her account. But Mrs. Moriarty has addressed the last question to him, and is looking up in his face for a reply.

“It is difficult for me to answer you,” he says at length. “without personal observation, but, from what you tell me, I am inclined to think that Miss Moriarty is suffering from some mental blow or disappointment, which time alone can heal. Keep her amused, Mrs. Moriarty ; surround her with cheerful society ; this is not a case (as far as I can judge) for the doctor's interference, but for that of her friends and her own good sense.”

“But it is as to one of her *friends*, Lewis, that I have come to you ; I know you like our Mary : save her for me, for God's sake !”

“How can I save her, dear Mrs. Moriarty, if she is not physically in need of me ?”

“Come and talk to her, and find out what is the matter. I dare not send for you professionally, she might refuse to see you ; that is why I have come here to-night, to ask you to pay a visit to the Manor House to-morrow, and have a long talk with Mary, and tell me exactly what you think of her.”

“*Don't ask me, Mrs. Moriarty !*” exclaims Lewis, with agitation ; “*I have no right to question your daughter, or*

pry into her secrets. She would resent it as an insult ; besides—besides—”

“Besides *what*, my dear friend? Surely you feel enough interest in her—in us—to do as I desire you?”

“God knows I do! But, the fact is, I feel *too* much interest, Mrs. Moriaty. Since you have asked me to do this thing, I ought to tell you my reasons for refusing, even at the risk of your condemning me as a presumptuous fool. I love your daughter Mary above all created beings, and I was once rash enough to tell her so. She refused me without hesitation. It was all over in a minute, and on my side you may depend the question will never be renewed.”

“Oh, Lewis! don’t say *that*,” exclaims Mrs. Moriaty, interrupting him and seizing his hand, “for I would rather *you* had her than any other man in the world.”

This rejoinder is so utterly unexpected, that it gives Lewis Vangel almost a greater shock than the refusal of his suit had done.

“Mrs. Moriaty,” he replies, after his first surprise ; “you can’t think of what you are saying. Have you forgotten my position, and the miserable pittance I have to live upon? I had no right to mention the subject to your daughter, but it burst from me almost unawares. What would Mr. Moriaty say to such an impudent proposal?”

“I don’t see any impudence in it, and I only wish my May had taken a fancy to you. I repeat I would rather have you for my son than any one I know. You are poor, and a beginner, but so is every man at first. Mr. Moriaty was just the same, and I had no money either, so we struggled up the hill together. But now that we have made more than we require for ourselves we sha’n’t let our only child begin in the same way, you may depend upon it. We shall help her husband on, and, if you and *she* take a liking for each other, I’m sure you won’t find

Mr. Moriarty backward in finding all that's necessary for your beginning life together."

"Oh, stop! Mrs. Moriaty, stop!" cries Lewis; "Your kindness pains me. That (instead of being angry with me, and calling me all sorts of hard names for my presumption) you should meet me (as it were) half-way, overwhelms me with gratitude. But, you see it doesn't depend upon you. Your daughter does not love me. She told me so plainly, and without love a princess of the blood-royal would be valueless to me."

"I understand that. Still, it's hard that Mr. Moriaty and I (not to speak of Mary herself) should lose a friend because the child's too foolish or too blind to see your merits. Don't refuse to help her in this strait, Lewis, for I'm half-wild with fear and doubt. If you love her, as you say you do, come and see what you can do for her, for your own sake as well as ours."

"I *will* come, Mrs. Moriaty, since you desire it, but in the capacity of her medical adviser, nothing more. You set me a hard task," says Lewis, with clenched teeth, "but perhaps it is my duty to go through with it. You have my promise, I shall never breathe another word of love to her! I am a proud man, and I would not risk a second refusal, but, for your sake, and in gratitude for the many kindnesses you have shown me, I will do my very best for Miss Moriaty."

CHAPTER XI.

A MIND DISEASED.

WHEN a man has been refused in marriage by the girl he *loves*, and is humble enough to ascribe his disappointment *entirely to his own presumption* in aspiring to her *hand*, it is rather startling to be told by her mother, that he

is one amongst a thousand whom she would have selected for her daughter's husband. Lewis Vangel is both flattered and excited by Mrs. Moriatty's reception of his news, but, though it causes a great revulsion of feeling in his breast, he does not permit it to make him at all hopeful that the end he desires will ever come to pass. He accepts it as an earnest of the mother's friendship, and nothing more. After he has accompanied Mrs. Moriatty back to the Manor House gates, and done his best to soothe her fears concerning her daughter, he returns to his own home, not to resume his interrupted labors, but to think over what he has heard. Mary Moriatty is no longer the woman who has caused him so much mental suffering. She is his patient, and he will see her on the morrow in the capacity of her medical adviser, bound in honor to think only of her health, physical and mental, and to thrust his own feelings completely in the background. Doctors are brought up to stow all sentiment away in this unromantic manner. Did they not do so, they would never be able to get through their painful and harrowing business in the way they do. Honestly, Lewis Vangel does not think very seriously of Mrs. Moriatty's alarming report of Mary's condition. He has seen hysteria in all its phases, and knows the extraordinary things it induces its victims to say and do, and he considers it extremely probable that the unusual dissipation and the late hours to which she has been subjected during her visit to town, have induced a condition of mind and body, quite abnormal to her usual temperament. Mary Moriatty is not naturally placid like her mother. She inherits more of the Irish disposition, being excitable and easily moved to tears or laughter, but, fortunately for herself, she is usually frank and open as the day. Why, then, has she not confided the reason of her trouble to Mrs. Moriatty? This is the question which puzzles the young doctor, and makes him almost sur

that the girl must be writhing under some disappointment of the heart. It is a bitter conclusion for him to arrive at, but he tells himself it is a wholesome one, and will enable him all the sooner to crush the hopeless sentiment he entertains for her. As he walks up to the Manor, according to his promise, on the following morning, he resolves to be very cheerful, and not to let May guess, by either word or look, that he sees any change in her appearance. But he has a difficult task to adhere to his resolution, the first sight of her shocks him so much. As soon as his voice is heard, Mrs. Moriaty, pale, but forcing herself to smile, meets him in the hall.

"Ah, here is our dear Doctor Vangel," she exclaims. "Now, this is good of you to come and pay us a visit. I have been expecting to see you ever since May's return, and papa has asked me a dozen times the last week if I had met you anywhere. But I know you've been very busy. Fruit season always brings a lot of work for the doctors. Come into the dining-room and see May. She's been sitting there ever since breakfast."

She talks brightly, and with an assumed cheerfulness, but Lewis can see that her lip is trembling the while. He tries to reassure her by taking no notice of it.

"You may be sure," he answers, "that I would have come sooner had I been able. I am longing to hear Miss Moriaty's impressions of London and Paris. But I only heard for certain that she was home yesterday morning."

The poor fellow feels as if he were about to plunge into cold water on a winter's day, but he will not permit himself to falter, and walks straight into Mary's presence. She is sitting by the window, gazing listlessly into the garden beyond. She has on a white gown, and her face is of the same color. Her hands are folded idly in her lap, and her eyes are fixed, apparently, upon the bed of flowers in the *parterre* before her. But it is the expression

of those eyes that shocks Lewis Vangel so terribly. Their bright blue hue seems to have become dulled and gray, dark rings, betokening ill-health or sleepless nights, encircle them, and they wear a pathetic, haunted, and scared look that is infinitely touching. He no longer wonders that her mother should think the girl is mad. The causeless terror, for which lunacy is remarkable, is strikingly apparent in them. But, whatever he may think, he does not allow himself to betray by either word or feature, but, going up cheerfully to her, extends his hand.

"Let me welcome you back to Withyslea, Miss Moriaty," he says, with a smile; "and I only hope you are as glad to come home again as we are to receive you. Has your mother told you how terribly you have been missed? I don't think we have ever had such a dull harvesting; there has been no fun at all. No one seemed to have the heart to inaugurate syllabub or strawberry feasts, and all the cry was, 'Let us wait till May comes home!' I suppose you have seen the Newhams, and heard their grand news, that Bessie is to be married to young Lancaster at Christmas? It is very funny to see them together. All the sisters seem to consider they have a share in him, and they nearly pull him to pieces between them."

He talks rapidly, and without a pause, as men do when they are nervous; but May does not answer him, and her mother comes to the rescue.

"No; May hasn't seen any of her friends as yet, Doctor Vangel. You are positively the first we have admitted. The Newhams have called, but she didn't feel well enough to talk, so I was obliged to send them away again. For, do you know, the dear child is not at all well, and I want you to give her a tonic, or something of the sort, to set her up."

"*Not well!*" echoes Lewis interrogatively, as though

were the first hint he had received of it. "Why, how's that, Miss Moriarty? Perhaps you have brought a little touch of malaria with you from Paris. It's not always healthy at this time of the year. Will you let me feel your pulse?"

"No," replies May pettishly—it is the first word she has spoken to him—"I am all right, thank you. I don't want any medicine. There is nothing the matter with me."

"May, my darling," remonstrates her mother, "let Doctor Vangel feel your pulse. It is a mere matter of form, but you know you don't sleep well, and he may be able to think of something that will enable you to do so."

"All right, if it is to make me sleep," says May, as she puts out her hand.

Lewis is angry with himself because he has to exercise self-control to prevent his fingers trembling as they touch her wrist. But, the moment he feels her pulse, all other thoughts are merged in those of his profession. What a jerky, irregular, rapid pulse it is,—mounting in degree almost to fever heat, and telling of a thousand mental agitations which are feeding on the strength of the body. He releases the tender wrist with an inward sigh.

"Aren't you a little bit of a humbug, Miss Moriarty," he says, with a smile, "to go frightening your poor mother with the idea that you are ill? I am afraid it's all those 'dear, delightful theatres and dances' that are at the bottom of this. You have been overwrought, that is all; and now that the strain is relaxed, you feel the reaction. Confess, now, that you have been turning your nights into days, and dancing and dissipating all through this terribly hot weather."

"Yes, I have been out a good deal," replies the girl, with a deep sigh.

"You are sure to feel the change at first, but it will *soon pass*. There is nothing like home comfort and home *happiness* to cure an overwrought body or overstrung

nerves. But I will send you a little tonic, all the same, if you will take it."

"Oh, I am sure she will be good and take it, Doctor Vangel," replies Mrs. Moriatty, answering for her daughter; "won't you darling? Why, there's papa calling me! Excuse me a minute, I will be back directly," and she leaves the young people together as she speaks.

"*Will* you be good and take it?" asks Lewis gently of Mary Moriatty.

She looked up hurriedly with her scared eyes, as if she would read his thoughts; but there is nothing but kindly interest written in his face.

"Yes, I will take it," she answers, "but really, I am not ill. I am only (as you say) tired. Doctor Vangel, do you remember telling me at the picnic that I should soon be longing for Withyslea air and Withyslea flowers again? You were right. I did long for them often."

"Well, you have come back to them, you see, and I daresay you will value them all the more for the brief separation. But no doubt you have enjoyed yourself very much both in London and Paris?"

The girl shudders.

"No, no! I didn't care much for them. I don't like towns. I never wish to go back again."

"That will be good news for your father and mother. I know they missed you sadly, though they were too kind, perhaps, to tell you so. You are the light of their eyes, remember. They could not live without you. That is why it is your duty to take care of your health, and give them as little anxiety as you need do."

"I mean to," replies May. "I shall never leave Withyslea again. But oh!" she cries, suddenly breaking down, "what shall I do with my life? What shall I do with my life?"

"Are you afraid you will find it so dull?" he inquires gently.

"No, no! I don't want gayety. I don't know what I'm saying. But the quiet seems to drive me wild. Doctor Vangel, I really think I am a little, just a little, ill. It is a long journey and the sea that has upset me. But don't tell mamma. Give me something to make me sleep, and—and—forget everything, and don't tell any one I asked you for it."

"You may rely upon my silence. I know just what you want, and it shall be a little secret between you and me," he answers quietly.

But at that moment the shrill voice of Miss Cassie Prew is heard outside the door. She has evidently forced her way into the hall, and is arguing with the footman, who is attempting to keep her out.

"*Not at home?*" they can hear her say, "nonsense. I don't believe it. You are not telling me the truth. Why, it's only twelve o'clock. Where are they, if they're not at home? I have business with Mrs. Moriatty, and I insist upon seeing her."

"Oh, Doctor Vangel," cries May, "she is coming in here."

She has been pretty calm up to that moment, but now her manner entirely changes. Hysteria gets the better of her, and she doesn't know what she is about. She clings to him with a force that is almost pain—her blue eyes are full of terror, and she begins to shriek like a mad woman.

"Don't let her in. I can't see her. I am not well enough. I won't see any of the prying, curious, scandal-making Withyslea people. Oh, Doctor Vangel it will kill me. Save me! save me! Don't let her come in."

She has thrown her arms about him in her hysterical mania. Her face is lifted to his own. He would give the world to be able to take her to his heart, and protect her from every fear. But all he can say is,—

"Be quiet, dear Miss Moriatty. No one shall annoy

you. I will see you are left undisturbed. Only let me go and settle this matter for you." But he has to tear himself away from her by force, whilst her screams continue to reverberate through the apartment, and are patent to everybody in the house. He is only just in time to prevent Miss Prew from turning the handle of the door.

"You will excuse me," he says firmly, "but you cannot go into that room. Miss Moriarty is not well."

"Indeed, and you are there?"

"I am her doctor," replies Lewis, with his back against the door, "and I forbid it."

Then he turns to the servant, and tells him to go and fetch his mistress.

"Well, I never *heard* of such a thing," exclaims Miss Prew, bristling with indignation. "A young man of eight-and-twenty—doctor or no doctor—locked up alone with a young unmarried lady, when her own friends are not allowed to see her. And, pray, what is she screaming about? What have you been doing to her? When my papa had to attend female patents, he always insisted upon a lady being present, to prevent scandal. But everything seems changed now-a-days. What is the matter with Mary Moriarty? At least *that* cannot be a secret."

"Here is her mother, you had better question her," replies Lewis, as Mrs Moriarty appears upon the scene, and he slips into the dining-room again. May is somewhat calmer by this time, and sitting up with an expectant look upon her face, but, directly the door opens, her terror returns.

"Will she force her way in?" she exclaims, in a voice of fear.

"No! no one shall come in against your wish," replies Lewis firmly; "but you must make an effort, Miss Moriarty, to see some of your friends. The village (as you observed just now) is full of scandal and curiosity, and *you must not give them an occasion to exercise it.* Be-

sides, why should you? You are only making a foundation for them to build their idle talk upon. You have nothing to fear, or to be ashamed of."

"May's pale cheeks redden.

"Of course not! How should I have?" she answers, with a sort of gasp; "but I hate them all. And I—I—feel so weak."

"I know you do! But you must try and conquer it. The fresh air will do you good. Why not go for a nice drive with your mother?"

"Oh, I don't want to," cries May, shrinking backwards; "I detest the glaring sunshine and the gaudy flowers, and the birds, and everything that seems so gay. They worry me! Didn't I tell you just now that I had had enough of gayety?" she adds, with a feeble attempt at jesting. But Lewis Vangel looks very far from jesting. He is making up his mind to allude to something that his pride revolts from, but, as usual, he comes off conqueror.

"Miss Moriatty," he commences solemnly, "do you remember the picnic in Outram Woods?"

"Of course I do! It was my last happy day in Withyslea."

"Up to now, you mean. There are many such happy days in store for you, I am sure of that, so it is useless to shake your head at me. But I think you promised me on that occasion, that if you were ever in trouble you would treat me as a friend?"

"I remember, and I meant it!"

"You are in trouble now, yet you do not place any confidence in me."

"But this is different! I am not well, and—"

"You have experienced some great disappointment which you believe you can never recover," continues Lewis. "It is of no use denying it. I can read your *thoughts better than you can tell them to me. Let me be your friend now, Miss Moriatty, as well as your*

doctor, and advise you as to the best means of securing forgetfulness."

"How can you tell?" she demands, with open eyes.

"Because I have passed through the mill myself, and know that, though medicine may assist a little, it can never take the place of self-control. You are suffering deeply. I see that plainly, and the more you sit at home and nurse your grief, the worse it will become. Your best remedy lies in action."

"But I don't feel strong enough to do anything."

"Not just yet, because you have had no time to recover yourself. But you need not sit still all day with folded hands and despairing eyes, and frighten your dear good mother half out of her senses. She idolizes you, Miss Moriarty, and you are giving her terrible pain. Don't be so selfish. Rouse yourself for her sake (if not for your own), and soothe her anxiety. Fancy what she must feel at receiving you home in this condition?"

"But what can I do, Doctor Vangel?"

"You can go out for a drive with her (as I recommended you just now), for one thing; it will do you both good, and it will answer more purposes than one. You don't want all Withyslea to be talking of this mysterious change in you, do you, Miss Moriarty?"

She glances up at him in a piteous way, and puts her hand in his.

"No! no! Oh, Doctor Vangel, *do* be my friend."

"I will—God helping me!—now and always. You are passing through your first great trouble. It is very hard to bear when we are unaccustomed to it, but it soon grows familiar, and then we are better able to endure. But in every trouble we can always find some one worse off than ourselves, and to whom our sympathy and help may prove a consolation. I don't ask what your trouble is. I don't want to know it. But there must be many girls (even in Withyslea) who have suffered in like measure—"

"No! no! not like me," says May, with the natural selfishness of grief.

Lewis regards her earnestly for a moment.

"Not like you, then," he continues, after a pause, "but perhaps far worse than you. What do you say to poor Ruth Williams, in whom you used to take so much interest?"

"*Ruth Williams!*" repeats May, in a low voice.

"Yes, Ruth Williams. I would not mention her, except that your mother approved of your sympathy with her sad story. She is sadder now than ever, poor Ruth! Her baby died during the harvesting, and all the neighbors congratulate her on the fact, which doesn't make it the easier to bear. But she had to work all the same, even whilst it lay dead in the house at home."

"She is compelled to work for her living," replies May.

"True: and you are morally compelled to work, in this instance, for the gratitude you owe your parents. No one ever had more loving parents than yourself. It may be distasteful to you, and a great effort, to try and appear as usual, but it is your bounden duty, and the sooner you do it the sooner you will be well again. Now, will you go out in the carriage with your mother?"

"Yes," says May, "because *you* ask me, and I feel you are right. I always feel *that*, Doctor Vangel. I told you so once, you may remember, and even *seeing* you has done me good."

At that moment Mrs. Moriatty re-enters the room with a face full of concern.

"Will you believe," she says, "that I have only just succeeded in getting rid of Miss Prew? The pertinacity of that woman is something extraordinary! And when she must have known I was dying to get back to dear May! How are you, my darling? Better, I hope? *These attacks* of yours distress me beyond measure."

"*But you are not to be distressed*, Mrs. Moriatty," says

Lewis, smiling, "for there is nothing alarming about Miss Moriatty's symptoms, which only proceed from weakness. I have been recommending her carriage exercise, and she has consented to try it. Will you order the open carriage to be ready as soon as it is possible?"

"Oh ! my darling, will you really come with me?" exclaims Mrs. Moriatty, as she kisses her daughter.

"Yes, mother. Doctor Vangel says I am equal to it, and therefore I will try," replies May dejectedly.

"Send for her maid and her things down here, Mrs. Moriatty," says Lewis. "Don't let her have more bodily fatigue than you can possibly avoid. Keep her out for a couple of hours, and when she comes in give her a glass of champagne, and let her lie down and go to sleep. And now, as the dressing is to be begun, I will be off," he continues, jumping up, and offering his hand.

May holds it tight in hers.

"Do come with us," she urges.

"I wish I could, but I haven't time. I have been here for an hour and a half. But I will send up that tonic to-day, and look in and see how you are to-morrow. Good-bye, and don't forget what I've told you."

And, with an animated nod, he quits the room. Mrs. Moriatty follows him into the hall.

"What do you think of her?" she demands anxiously.

"Just what I surmised last night, my dear friend. She has received a mental shock. Take no notice of it. It will work its own cure."

But the mother is not satisfied.

"You really think that is all?" she inquired.

"As far as I can see, I really think that is all, though it is bad enough. There is no physical disturbance, but her mind is unhinged. Keep her as much in the air as possible, and get the Newhams and her other young friends to pop in upon her unawares. If you propose a visit from them, she will probably refuse to see them.

But lively society and cheerful conversation, and no time for brooding, are her best means of cure."

"Oh, Lewis!" whispers Mrs. Moriaty, "what *can* it arise from? Have you any idea?"

"Not the slightest. She has been away from home for three months. Who can say what has happened in the interim?"

"I wish I had never let her go," says the mother.

"But I made sure that in the care of her Aunt Kathleen she would be so perfectly safe."

"Have you heard from Lady O'More since your daughter's return?"

"Only a few lines, to say she trusts dear May reached home safely. She is still in Paris. Perhaps she could throw some light on this matter."

"My advice to you is, don't ask her. Don't mention it to any one outside your own circle. It cannot do any good, and it is not fair to Miss Moriaty."

"How thoughtful and sensible you are!" she says, pressing his hand. "You might be fifty, Lewis, from the way you talk."

"I never was young," he answers, laughing. "My mother says I was born old."

"Ah! how I wish—" she commences, but he guesses what she is going to say, and prevents her.

"Never mind what you wish," he interposes, with gentle playfulness. "What you have to do now is to go back to your daughter, and keep as close to her side as you can until she is quite herself again. I will look in again to-morrow. Good-bye," and with a wave of the hand he is gone.

CHAPTER XII.

WITHYSLEA WONDERS.

ALL this time Mr. Moriatty has been just as anxious as his wife about the strange alteration in their daughter's appearance and demeanor. He is every whit as fond and proud of May as her mother can be, and is disposed to bitterly resent the little care his sister appears to have taken of her. But he believes her enfeebled and hysterical condition to be the extent of the evil. Mrs. Moriatty has said nothing to him about the state of her daughter's mind. They are one of those good old-fashioned couples—unfortunately now so rare—who have never had any mysteries or secrets from one another. His wife has told him every thought from her wedding-day, and he feels satisfied he has heard all there is to hear on the present occasion. But just for once, the good man is mistaken. Women have keener insight and readier intuition than the other sex, and are apt to be more cunning where their affections are concerned. And Mrs. Moriatty—dear, simple soul!—has a deep plot hatching in her brain, which is to marry May, if possible, to Lewis Vangel. Ever since she heard the confession of his love for her, she has thought the matter over and over until it has grown quite familiar. What could be more suitable? she says to herself. Lewis is, without exception, the best and most sensible and amiable young man of her acquaintance—an excellent son, and, therefore, sure to make a good husband—and oh! her heart would feel so much at ease if she could see her May safe under his protection. They would keep her with them then, under their own eyes, and be ready to help her in any time of need. This fact alone enhances

the value of Lewis Vangel as a prospective son-in-law in her eyes. His poverty is quite a secondary consideration to the unworldly woman, and if she can only bring Mr. Moriarty to view the matter in the same light as she does, she believes they will soon settle it between them. So, on the first good opportunity, she attacks him on the subject.

"How is Mary, my dear?" he inquires, as they retire to rest that evening.

"A little better, I think, Dan. She has had no attack since this morning, and she had quite a color after her drive. What a wonderful young man Lewis Vangel is."

"Wonderful! In what way? I've not perceived it. I think he's a very good young fellow, but how—wonderful?"

"Dear Dan, if you had only seen how he persuaded our May to take a tonic, and go out driving this morning. You know that she would not listen to either you or me—her own parents. But Doctor Vangel has such a way with him—so firm and determined, and yet so kind, that she gave in at once."

"Ah, people will often do that for strangers when they won't listen to their own relations. We have indulged May too much, I am afraid, my dear—regularly spoilt her, in fact, and now we shall reap the harvest of our weakness."

"Oh, don't say that, Dan. She's always been the best child in the world to us until this illness came on her, and we must make excuses for sickness, you know."

"That's all very well, my dear, but May's been a wilful puss from the beginning, and we haven't kept a tight enough hand over her. What she wants to keep her in order is a good husband, who'll rule her firmly but gently, and stand no nonsense of hysterics and such fiddle-faddle. *It really makes me angry with her for the first time in her life, and if it's the effect of London and Paris gayety, and*

my sister O'More's teaching, why, May shall never go back to her, and that I'm determined on."

"Oh! she doesn't want to go back, love; she resents the very idea. She says she wishes never to leave our side again. Dan, can you keep a secret?"

"Well, I don't think I've ever betrayed one of yours, have I, pussy? Whom does the secret concern?"

"May and—and another. I've made a discovery, but you must never repeat it. Lewis Vangel is in love with our Mary."

Mr. Moriarty starts. The idea is so entirely new to him.

"Lewis Vangel! Oh, nonsense. This is one of your mares' nests, my dear. Don't you remember how certain you were that Dolly, the dairymaid, had a lover, and slunk out to meet him at night, and when you came upon them one evening, she was only talking to a girl from Ascott's farm. Vangel has something else to do than to come philandering after our Mary. Why, he's known her from a child.

"And what difference does that make, you old goose? All the more time to get fond of her. But, as you say it's a mare's nest, I'll tell you something more. Doctor Vangel confessed it to me himself."

"He told you he loved our Mary? Like his impudence!"

"He wasn't impudent about it at all. He was most modest and humble, a great deal too humble, dear fellow."

"Hullo! why, you'll be in love with him next."

"I think I am, Dan—just a little," she answers laughing. "But I have not told you all. He proposed to her at the picnic we gave in Outram Wood, and she refused him, on the plea that she had never thought of marriage yet. Now, don't you think that looks as if she would have accepted him if she had had a little time to consider it?"

"Can't say I do, but I haven't got over the wonder of it yet. Vangel proposed marriage to Mary! But what did he intend to keep her on?"

"Oh, that's not the question at all," cries his wife impatiently, "the question is, does she love him? I am *sure* he loves her, but she has left him no hope. Only—can she have been thinking over it and fretting about it during her absence, and brought herself down to this nervous condition, without any want of care on the part of your sister—eh, Dan?"

"Really, pussy, you've taken me so much by surprise I don't know *what* to think. Isn't May very young for all this sort of thing?"

"Oh, no. She was eighteen last June. Many girls are married before that. But what should you think of the idea, Dan? Lewis Vangel is a thorough gentleman, and you like him very much."

"Yes, I like him exceedingly, and always have done so, but he has no means to keep a wife."

"Oh, we must *give* him the means!" exclaims Mrs Moriarty confidently. "What shall we want with all our money when Mary is gone? We could buy Wotton House for them, and settle a thousand a year on Mary, and the matter would be done."

Mr. Moriarty laughs heartily.

"Trust a woman for settling everything right off!" he exclaims. "But what does Mary say?"

"My dear Dan, I haven't hinted a word to Mary. I wouldn't do it without your sanction. But only think how nice it would be to have her always close at hand, instead of being whisked off, perhaps, to some foreign country, and leaving us to die without a sight of her dear face. She's our only one, Dan. It isn't as if we had another daughter to take her place."

"*That's the most sensible light you've put it in yet, my dear. I don't know how I should bear to part with Mary,*

nor what life would look like if she left us. It would certainly be a great advantage to keep her always in Withyslea. But if she has said 'No' to Vangel, what's the use of talking about it?"

"Oh, Dan, girls will change their minds a dozen times. And I'm sure she thinks a lot of him, and, if we throw them together, there's no knowing what may happen. Only, what will you say if it comes to pass?"

"If our girl loves him and wants to marry him, I shall say 'all right.'"

"Just like my own Dan," cries Mrs. Moriatty, hugging him well, "and you'll make the money business easy for them too, won't you?"

"Why, of course; I always meant to settle a good round sum on the girl when she marries, and the higher the husband's rank the more he'd expect to get with her. But May's husband will be our son, whoever he may be, and I shall treat a country doctor the same as I should treat a lord."

"Oh, we don't want any lords turning up their noses, perhaps, at you and me, Dan," says his wife. "For my part, I would rather see May marry Lewis Vangel than any man I know. And he'll be the best of sons to you and me, I am sure of that. Why, I love him like one already, and I told him so only the other day. He's so good-looking, too, and so clever. How May can have had the heart to refuse him beats me all together."

"Well, I see the sooner I go home, at this rate, the better," responds Mr. Moriatty, much amused by his wife's enthusiasm, "and then, if Mary won't take him after all, *you* can, old lady, and keep the estimable young man in the family."

But Mrs. Moriatty will not allow of even a jest upon such a subject. Her kind, mild eyes fill with tears as she turns them reproachfully upon her husband, and he thinks she

looks as loving and (in his eyes) as lovely as she did upon their wedding-day.

And so this unconventional couple settle it between themselves that, if Lewis Vangel's suit is ever renewed and accepted, they are to crown their daughter's decision with their approbation. Unlike the stereotyped fathers and mothers in romances—who are nevertheless faithful representations of most parents—instead of sending the penniless suitor away with a frown from their presence, they agree to open their arms and receive him as a son. Their acquired wealth has been powerless to close their hearts and make them consider it deserves an equivalent. On the contrary, they (metaphorically) say to their fellow-creatures, "We have been lucky. Come and share our luck. *We* have money, therefore *you* need have none. Let us all be happy together, and halve the good things that God has given us."

What a real treasure wealth could be if it opened people's natures thus. But Mr. and Mrs. Moriatty stand unique in the world's history as dispensers of their worldly goods. In fact—even as I write of them—my belief in their existence seems to disappear. The richer people are, as a rule, the closer-fisted they become. The more they have, the more they require. If you want a kindness done to you—a dinner when you are hungry—a nurse when you are sick—go to the poor, and leave the rich to selfishly revel in their acquisitions. The time will come when in hell they will lift up their eyes and crave for the drop of cold water in vain; for we make our own heaven, and we make our own hell by the way in which we treat our fellow-creatures on this earth.

After this conversation, Mrs. Moriatty's anxiety about her daughter is somewhat allayed, though anything but cured, but she thinks she sees the remedy before her, and *she determines* to seize every opportunity to bring it *about*. *She encourages* Lewis Vangel to come often to

the house, and she invites him to dinner in the evenings. The young man, who dreads a repetition of the suffering he has hardly subdued, would refuse her invitations without ceremony, did she not whisper to him that Mary never seems so cheerful, nor eats so well, as when he is sitting at the table. And so he goes—for *her* sake, and because he has promised to be her friend—but without the slightest idea of the plot that is hatching against him.

Meanwhile, the indignation of Withyslea at the secrecy regarding Mary Moriarty's illness knows no bounds. Miss Cassie Prew marches straight from the Manor House to the Vicarage, to retail the account of her repulsion into the sympathetic ears of the "pure-souled Charlotte," who feels the affront offered to her "jackal" almost as deeply as if she had suffered it in her own sacred person. Withyslea has been always more or less disposed to resent the fact of the Moriats being so much richer than the rest of its inhabitants, although it has toadied them for that very reason, but when their assurance reaches the climax of baulking its natural curiosity, Withyslea can contain itself no longer.

"It's downright insolence, my dear, nothing else," exclaims Mrs. Crosbie, when Miss Prew has finished her story; "and as for that Lewis Vangel, I'd like to choke him. Fancy, a man of *his* age presuming to stand on his authority as a doctor, to refuse a *lady* admittance to her own friends. I never heard of such a thing in all my life! Besides, when has there been any mystery about his parish patients before? Hasn't he always been ready enough to apply to the Vicar for soup, and wine, and other necessities for the sick? When the Jamiesons were all down with the typhoid fever, wasn't Doctor Vangel the first person to suggest that an hospital nurse should be sent from Leaton, to prevent the disease spreading? He made no secret of *their* disorders. And why should *any difference* be made for Mary Moriaty? It's my belief,

Miss Prew, there's something more there than meets the eye."

Miss Cassie opened *her* eyes.

"Do you, really? What can it be?"

"She's not ill at all, take my word for it! Sending for the doctor is a mere blind, but they have been obliged to let him into the conspiracy. And he'd do anything the Moriats told him. He's in love with that girl. I've seen it for a long time."

"Oh, you're so clever! you'd see anything, dear Mrs. Crosbie; but if Doctor Vangel is thinking of marrying Mary Moriats, I pity him, for she is a bold, bad girl."

"*Marrying her!* Why, my dear Miss Prew, do you imagine for a moment that her parents would consent to such a match? Trust them for keeping a better look-out for her than that. These vulgar people, who have made their money by trade, always expect to buy titles for their daughters. Not that they'll ever get one for *their* girl! She's not polished enough for high society."

"But what then do you imagine is the reason for all this fuss?" demands Miss Prew.

"My belief is that she's misconducted herself in some way whilst with Lady O'More, and been sent home in disgrace. I know they didn't expect her back for some weeks to come, for I met Mrs. Moriats the day before Mary arrived, and she told me so. What do you make of *that*?"

"It is very mysterious. There is no doubt of it. One would naturally expect, if she had returned to Withyslea as she ought to have returned, that Miss Moriats would be quite impatient to see her friends, and tell them all her news."

"There it is, you see. And you say you heard her scream?"

"*Scream* is no word for it, dear Mrs. Crosbie. Her *shrieks* were appalling. They froze the marrow in my

bones. And that impudent fellow stood with his hand on the door-knob, and forbade me to enter."

"Didn't you ask her mother why she was screaming?"

"Of course I did. I put every question to her that I could possibly think of, but she was as close as the grave. All she would say was, that 'poor dear May had been so fatigued and upset by the long journey, that she was rather hysterical, and the doctor recommended quiet and rest.' Oh, she was quite rude, I can assure you. Just as I was trying to find out if Lady O'More was still in Paris, or had returned to England with her niece, she pushed past me and said, 'You really must excuse me, but my daughter requires my presence, and I can't talk to you any more this morning.' And she went into the dining-room and left me standing in the hall by myself. I never experienced such impoliteness before. One would think my father had been *nobody*, instead of being respected and loved for miles around. I felt it deeply, I can assure you."

"Well, we must find out what it all means," exclaims the Vicar's wife sharply. "Now, *who* is most likely to be able to inform us? Let me think," and she rests her chin on her hand, and puckers up her brow.

"Mrs. Handyside," suggested Miss Prew.

"Mrs. Handyside, nonsense. They'll keep all they can from their own servants, you may depend upon that. And the housekeeper is not likely to go near her room. I was thinking of old Mrs. Vangel."

"Should you think her son told her anything? He is such a very deep, prudent young man. I used to think his eyes were handsome when he first came amongst us, but they look very cunning to me at times now."

"No, I don't believe Doctor Vangel would tell her anything, but she is sure to see and hear a great deal for herself, and the old lady is fond of a chat now and then."

Suppose you go over and see her this afternoon, when he has started for his rounds? I would visit her myself, only I promised dear Mr. Somerset to accompany him to East-weir. I suppose you've heard old Jacobs, the mill-owner, is dead?"

"No, indeed. When did that happen?"

"Last night. The Vicar was sent for at about nine o'clock, and remained with him till he died at three. The old man had always steadily refused to go to confession or communion; however, he became frightened at the last, I suppose, and wished to avail himself of the privilege. And the Vicar heard such *awful* things from the old wretch, they made him quite ill."

"Dear, dear, *awful things*? You don't say so. What were they?"

"Oh, I mustn't repeat them to you, you naughty thing," cries Mrs. Crosbie playfully, "because they were told under the seal of confession, you know. Indeed, I suppose, I oughtn't to have heard them either, but then the Vicar says he never *can* keep anything from me, for he regards me as his second self."

"Oh, so natural, so praiseworthy," murmurs Miss Prew. "Well, I always thought Jacobs was a wicked old man."

"*Wicked*, my dear! I should think he was. Do you remember that woman Brown, who lived on the moorland two years ago?"

"To be sure. A rosy-faced young woman, with dark hair and three or four children. A widow, wasn't she?"

"Ah, we all *thought* her a widow, and I do believe, now I come to think of it, she had coals and blankets at Christmas from the Widows' Fund. If we could only find her, she ought to be made to refund them. She was a regular swindler."

"*Wasn't* she a widow, then?"

"*Nothing* of the sort. She was old Jacobs'—but there,

I mustn't say another word, or the Vicar will scold me."

"How disgraceful! I understand. And I daresay that wasn't the worst thing he did."

"My dear, he was a regular old villain. He confessed to having poisoned Farmer Williams's cattle, and I believe he tried to kill his own wife. What men *will* do, to be sure. But I mustn't tell you any more. I am going to drive over with Mr. Somerset this afternoon to see the daughter, who is left alone in the house with her father's dead body."

"How good you are!" exclaims Miss Prew enthusiastically; "and dear Mr. Somerset, too. Models, both of you."

"Ah, *he* is good, if you like—so benevolent, so amiable, so devoted. He has the spirit of the early martyrs. I wish I were more like him."

"Dear Mrs. Crosbie, you need wish to be like no one but your own sweet self. And *I* am not the only one who thinks so," replies Miss Prew waggishly. "And so I will go and call on Mrs. Vangel, and see what I can gather."

"Like the little busy bee, 'gathering honey all the day from every opening flower,'" responds the Vicar's wife, smiling.

"And when may I bring my spoils home to the hive, the dear, *dear*, sacred hive of the Vicarage?"

"This evening. Come in and have a cup of tea with us at eight, and tell me all your news."

"Oh, I shall be so impatient for this evening," cries the old maid, as she trots off on her appointed errand.

Mrs. Vangel is a very nice old lady, but she is rather fond of a gossip about her neighbors. Who is to blame her? She is not malicious or backbiting, like Mrs. Crosbie or Miss Prew; indeed, she is inclined to be shocked occasionally by the stories they bring her; but she is rather lonely when her son is away from home, and pleased to see anyone who will step in and have a cup of tea with

her. So when, about four o'clock, Miss Prew puts in an appearance, she is warmly welcomed, and invited to sit down and make herself comfortable.

"I don't quite approve of afternoon tea," prosés the old lady; "Lewis says it destroys the appetite, and ruins the coats of the stomach, and it seems absurd to make a practice of spoiling one's regular meals. Still, it is very refreshing sometimes, and so if you will take a cup of tea with me, Miss Prew, I shall have great pleasure in ordering it."

Miss Prew assents, and the two ladies sit down in close juxtaposition.

"What a sad thing this is about Mary Moriatty," commences Cassie Prew, after the manner of those who "pump" who often gain their object by affecting to take that for granted of which they are quite uncertain.

Mrs Vangel stares at her visitor.

"Why, what's the matter with her?" she asks, "I have heard nothing."

"Indeed, and under the same roof as Doctor Vangel! I *am* surprised. Why, he's been at the Manor House all day, and her parents are in the most terrible state of anxiety about her."

"You don't mean to say so. For what reason?"

"Ah, *there* you puzzle me, dear Mrs. Vangel; indeed, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Crosbie and I are so concerned for the poor girl, we hoped you might be able to inform us. For that is the strangest part of it. Mary Moriatty is evidently very ill, but every one about her seems bound to secrecy on the subject. And where there is secrecy, one is so apt to fancy something must be wrong."

"To be sure, Miss Prew. I don't like secrecy myself. My son is very reticent, as you may have observed, and that sometimes gives me trouble. I say to him, 'Why *not tell?* What harm can it do?' but he prefers to keep *his matters to himself*. Now, only last evening— But

dear me," says Mrs. Vangel, interrupting herself, "that seems rather strange, after what you have just told me."

Miss Prew is immediately all eagerness to learn the reason of the interpolation.

"What seems strange, dear Mrs Vangel?"

"Why, something has just come into my mind that appears to bear upon the case. Last evening about ten o'clock, I was standing at that window, when I distinctly saw Mrs. Moriatty come into our gate, and go out again. I told Lewis it was Mrs Moriatty, but he laughed, and said I was mistaken, so I thought I must be. But after I had gone upstairs to bed, Miss Prew, I found Sarah had forgotten to fill my water bottle for the night—Sarah is the most forgetful girl I have ever had in my service—sometimes I think I must really get rid of her for that reason alone, for forgetfulness leads to so much inconvenience, and in a time of danger it might be the occasion of most disastrous consequences, and—"

"Yes! Yes! I quite agree with you, but what happened after you went to bed?" asks Miss Prew, anxious to bring the old lady back to her subject.

"I was coming to that, my dear. Well, I cannot go to sleep comfortably unless I know I have fresh water in my room—a glass of cold water is so very grateful during these warm nights—so I went down to the kitchen by the back stair to fill my bottle. The kitchen is only divided from the surgery by a short passage, you know, and what, to my astonishment, did I hear, but voices in the surgery talking together in very earnest tones. I had left dear Lewis writing in the sitting-room, and couldn't imagine what he was about, so I crept into the passage to listen, and there, my dear Miss Prew, you'll scarcely believe me, but I heard *Mrs. Moriatty's* voice. I did, indeed. Wasn't it extraordinary, at ten o'clock at night? And I don't believe she has ever set foot in the surgery before! I could

hardly credit my ears, but my hearing's perfect, thank God, and I'm sure I wasn't mistaken. I meant to have asked my son about it this morning, but he was off before I left my room, and hasn't been home since. And the circumstance had almost slipped my memory till you mentioned Miss Moriarty's name. I wonder if her mother's visit had anything to do with her illness? Isn't it rather extraordinary?"

"*Very* extraordinary, I should call it," rejoins Miss Prew, with a contemptuous sniff; "*more* than extraordinary, indeed. Highly indelicate to be shut up late at night with a gentleman in his surgery. If everything was straightforward, Mrs. Vangel, why couldn't she have come into your sitting-room, and said it out before you? I don't understand such underhand doings, and I don't like them. My papa used to say, 'If you are ashamed to speak, don't speak at all,' and I agree with him. Mary Moriarty has been amongst us since her childhood, and a very unpleasant and impertinent child she was. Why are we to be kept in the dark at the most important crisis of her life? Dear Mrs. Crosbie doesn't like the look of it, and no more do I. Their Vicar and their Vicar's wife should at least be taken into their confidence. But no one is to be told but Doctor Vangel, a young man of only eight-and-twenty."

"But Lewis is very clever and very steady," says the mother proudly, "and, though he doesn't care for his profession as I would like to see him, he has studied deeply, and is most reliable. If any one *can* cure Miss Moriarty, I am sure he will."

"I doubt it, Mrs. Vangel! I doubt if any doctor can cure *her* disease. She is just an obstinate, over-indulged girl, and has been getting into some terrible scrape—that's my belief."

"*But her mother would never have taken the trouble to walk over here unless something was wrong,*" argues *he old lady*.

"Oh, something *is* wrong—you may lay your life upon it that something is *wrong*," replied Miss Cassie Prew, as she hurries off to carry the latest intelligence to her fellow-slanderer.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SISTER OF MERCY.

THOUGH May has been enabled to overcome the first shock of her bitter disappointment, her spirits do not visibly improve, and her mother and father are still uneasy about her. And, what is worse in Mrs. Moriaty's eyes, is that the girl confides in no one, but wanders about, silent and depressed, all day long, feeding upon her secret grief. Again and again has her mother tried, by persuasion and entreaty, to make her unbosom herself; but May shrinks from all questioning, and insists that there is nothing the matter with her, and she is quite contented and quite well. But she refuses to leave the grounds of the Manor House, unless it be to drive in the open carriage, and resolutely avoids meeting any of her neighbors except Lewis Vangel, who has evidently more influence over her than any one else. Sometimes she seems impatient even of her parents' caresses; and any petting or extra indulgence is so persistently followed by a return of the hysterical symptoms, that Lewis advises them to leave her as much as possible unnoticed and alone. One morning, about three weeks after her return home, Mr. Moriaty receives a long letter from his sister.

"Come with me into the library," he says to his wife after breakfast, "I have something to show you."

He spreads out the crossed sheet of paper before her.

"Here's a palaver," he exclaims, "from my sister O'More. I haven't read half of it, but she seems to be in

rare trouble about that son of hers. They're back in London, and I'm wondering, pussy, if her story has anything to do with our May's illness. If it has, I'll break every bone in the young villain's body for him. Read it out, my dear, and give me your opinion."

The part of Lady O'More's letter which her brother alludes runs as follows :—

"My dear brother Dan,—I should have written again to you before now to inquire after your sweet Mary, but I have been in great trouble ever since my return to London. All my hopes and ambitions are over. I never was so crushed in my life before. I have written you of my son Denis, named after our own father, and a Moriarty every inch of him. His beauty was the talk of the town when we first came to London ; and till I saw your Mary, I thought a princess wouldn't be stooping herself to marry him, and have always looked forward to his making a grand match, and keeping up his poor father's name. Well, then, you may judge of my horror and amazement when I found he has been married in secret for two years past. I returned home as innocent of all this as a baby, and only thinking if you would spare your sweet girl to us again, when I was met on my own threshold by a horrid low woman, who said she was my son's wife. I wouldn't believe it till Denis corroborated it with his own lips, and it seems that my poor boy was taken in by this intriguing female and her mother, and compelled to marry her before he hardly knew what he was about. He is so good and tender-hearted, I might have made sure the day would come when he would get into some scrape of the sort. And I had such different views for him ! I don't mind confessing to you now, Dan, that my great hope was that May and he would take a liking for each other. I thought how charming it would be for you and me to be *united in our children* ; but all my hopes are laid in the dust. *And now, I am thinking, how is my poor Denis to support*

this dreadful creature he has made his wife, and who insists upon living with him? *I* cannot keep them, and perhaps a family in prospect; it is impossible. My poor boy has not been brought up to work; but he must do his best now, as I tell him, though he does not like the idea. Will my dear brother assist me with his advice? What can my son do; where am I to look for employment for him? To help him is to help me, for I cannot live in the same house as the woman he has married, nor have I the means to make my Denis an allowance."

After which ensues a detailed account of the deterioration in her Irish rents, and the consequent lessening of her income, mixed up with lamentations over her poverty and congratulations on her correspondent's immunity from all anxiety on that score. Mrs. Moriarty reads through the letter word by word, and lays it down without comment.

"Now then, pussy, what's your opinion of all that?" demands her husband, as she finishes it.

"I think it's a very broad hint that you should do something for her or her son, Dan; either increase her income or set him up in some employment."

"Then I'll be hanged if I do either," cries Mr. Moriarty, thumping the table with his hand; "I haven't worked hard all my life to waste my money on an idle young vagabond like that. Why didn't she bring him up to some honorable profession or trade, so that he might keep himself, and his wife into the bargain? But that's Kathleen all over. I suppose *her* son was too good for honest labor; his pretty face was to be his fortune. She never thought of anything but beauty, but she'll find it won't buy bread in this instance; and I suppose it is the face of this 'beauty young man' that has sent our girl's spirits down into her boots. I'd 'beauty' him if I got hold of him. If I only was sure he'd been playing fast and loose with our Mary, I'd smash his pretty face in with the heel

of my boot till his own mother didn't know him, the vain young fool ! ”

“ Oh, but stop, Dan. You mustn't talk like that,” exclaims his wife, with an instinctive desire to shield her daughter's pride ; “ you've no proofs he ever said a word to our Mary, and it's not likely he would, being a married man. *He* knew it, you see, though his mother didn't. It isn't fair to May even to think so ; and I feel sure (if it were the case) that she would have confided it to me ; indeed, I've as good as asked her ; don't you worry about our girl, Dan, she's coming round as fast as possible, and will be her own bonny self before the harvest's carried ; but, of course, you'll answer Lady O' More's letter as you think best.”

“ I shall tell her plump and plain that I know of no business fit for a man who's been reared in idleness, and that, as she has sown, so she must reap ; I'm sorry for her, though, all the same, she was always a silly, wrong-headed creature, but it must be hard to find one's own child has been deceiving and playing one false. It would kill me if I thought our Mary could turn out like that.”

“ You needn't be afraid, Dan, our Mary will never disappoint us,” replies Mrs. Moriatty, as she leaves him. She has pretended to be very confident and fearless before her husband, but she has made a shrewd guess at the state of affairs between Denis and May, and wonders if the news of her cousin's marriage will bring about the desired confidence between her daughter and herself. As she quits Mr. Moriatty's presence, she goes immediately in search of her, and finds her in the garden, seated in a basket chair under a walnut tree, holding a book in her hand, but gazing at the sky and the surrounding foliage instead of perusing it.

“ Have I been very long away, my darling ? ” says Mrs Moriatty, as she approaches her, “ and did you think I was quite lost ? ”

"No, mother," replies May languidly.

"I have been with your father in the library ; he had a letter to show me—a letter from your Aunt Kathleen."

At the mention of that name, a faint pink flush mounts to Mary's brow, which her mother is not slow to observe.

"Quite a long letter," she continues, finding she receives no answer, and rather a distressing one. Poor Lady O'More seems in great trouble about her son, your Cousin Denis, my dear. It seems he has been married for a couple of years, and his mother never knew of it till she returned home."

"Oh, has she heard of it?" exclaims May involuntarily.

"Why, my dear, did *you* know it?" returns her mother.

The girl fights with herself for a moment, and then, with a very red face, she answers,—

"Yes. My cousin told me, but he made me promise not to repeat it."

"And you heard it before his mother?"

"Yes."

"That he was a married man?"

"Yes."

"Oh, thank Heaven, my darling! I have been fancying all this time that you were fretting after him yourself. I *am* glad. It was quite right of your cousin to tell you, both of you being so young, and so much together. I didn't give him credit for so much honor. But he ought not to have kept it from his poor mother. To bring up a child, and then find out it has deceived you, must be the hardest thing of all."

She is about to throw her arms round May as she concludes, but the girl rises suddenly, and moves a little apart.

"What is the matter, darling? Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, yes! But the day is very warm."

"Just the day for a drive. Will you come with me to Willcott's farm, Mary? I want a clutch of his silver *Brahma's* eggs."

"If you wish it, mother."

"I do wish it, May, and I'll be ready in half-an-hour. Will you be here when I return?"

"Yes. I have no intention of moving."

She sinks down listlessly in the garden-chair again as Mrs. Moriarty disappears, and buries her face in her hands. Her heart is beating so loudly that she can count its throbs.

"I have deceived her," she thinks. "I have deceived everybody. Oh, how I hate myself and him. Shall I ever, *ever* feel like the same girl again? I, who have been kissed and caressed, and made love to by a *married man*." She shudders as the words pass through her brain, and are answered by a "*Never!* Oh, I hate him! *I hate him!*" she continues vehemently. "I should like to grind his false face beneath my heel to powder. How *dared* he deceive me so? He cajoled me with his fair words and promises. I did not love him. I never *could* have loved him, or (if I did) it has all turned into the deadliest and bitterest hate. If I were to hear he was dead to-morrow, I should be glad, and happy to think I should never see nor hear of him again."

She is still sitting with her head in her hands, listening to the throbbing and the whirring in her brain, when Lewis Vangel steps over the sward to her side.

"Does your head ache, Miss Moriarty?" he asks softly.

He knows quite well that it is heartache, and not headache, that oppresses her, but it is a peculiarity of Lewis Vangel that he never puts an awkward question without affording the respondent a loophole of escape. May does not start as he speaks. His voice sounds so gently on her ear that it soothes rather than irritates her. She lifts her eyes wearily to his, and answers,—

"A little! The day is very close, and I was thinking."

"Try *not* to think," he says. "You have no problems to solve. Leave your poor brains alone a little."

"How do you know I have no problems to solve? I have a very important one—what to do with myself."

"Come on my rounds with me," he says jestingly.

"I wish I could. I wish I was a doctor, or some one useful, that had no time to think."

"That is a very sensible wish on your part, Miss Moriarty. Depend on it, there is nothing like active work to help us over the troubles of this life. None of us are single in that respect, remember. We all have trouble of one sort or another, but it depends entirely on ourselves whether we turn it into a blessing or a curse. You can't be a doctor, but you can be a helper and consoler to your poorer neighbors in their trouble, and that is sometimes a post of much greater importance."

"Do you really think I could be of use to them?"

"I am sure of it. I am sure they would value a sight of your face, and a few kind words from you, more than all my nasty physic."

"But how shall I set about it, Doctor Vangel? Where can I begin?"

"The question will rather be, where will you leave off? The sorrow and sin will crop up afresh for your consideration every day, if you once turn your thoughts towards alleviating and consoling it."

"*Sin!*" repeats May, in a low voice; "is there any consolation for that?"

Lewis Vangel regards her compassionately.

"My dear child (forgive me, Miss Moriarty, but I have known you for so long that I sometimes forget that you are grown up), if there were not both hope and consolation for all the terrible sin of this world, how should we live through our despair? Why, the earth would be strewn with the hearts that had broken for the want of it. Do you think *that* is the way that God regards our shortcomings?"

"Oh, no! I had forgotten. But some sins are so much greater than others."

"I don't think so. I don't think God thinks so. I believe He judges us according to our opportunities and our proclivities. Some people are born more disposed for evil than others."

"I think you must have been born more disposed for good than others, Doctor Vangel," says May, with a slight smile.

"If I did not believe you were laughing at me, Miss Moriarty, I should scold you for talking such nonsense," replies Lewis, with a contracted brow. He looks at her in silence for a minute, and then goes on rapidly, "If you only knew—but God forbid you ever should—how often I have yielded to temptation, how often bewailed my own want of courage and consistency, only to fall again as soon as the opportunity returned, you would know what a despicably faulty creature I am. But the more I know myself to be fallible, the more I can sympathize with those who fall. Perfection could scarcely be expected to understand the weakness of guilt, and we seldom wish to console our fellow creatures until we have needed consolation ourselves."

"If mamma will let me, I should like so much to try," says May, almost eagerly, "and you must tell me to whom I shall go first."

"There is a young girl lodging at Mrs. Hodson's, who is dying of consumption, and another near the tan pit, a daughter of Luke, your father's groom, who is confined to her bed with a spinal complaint. I am sure that to both those girls your occasional presence and sympathy would be of the utmost value."

"I will ask mother. She is afraid of my catching fever, or any infectious complaint, but you will take care of that, won't you?"

"I will guard you—" begins Lewis ardently, but *checks himself*. "Of course I will see that you do not *run any risk*, but, happily, we have nothing contagious

in Withyslea at present. There is a poor young widow, whose husband was killed by an accident at Leaton a short time back, and who is daily expecting her first baby. She is very friendless and very poor, Miss Moriatty, and any kindness you could show her would, I know, be very gratefully received. She is grieving so much over the loss of her husband, that I am afraid it will seriously affect her health."

"What is her name?"

"Mary Morrison. She is a namesake of yours, you see, and she lives in that little tumbledown cottage by Fuller's Field. I am going on to see her now."

"Oh! may I go with you?" asks May, rising.

Her eyes are shining once more with anticipation. The prospect of consoling one who has suffered a greater loss than herself lends them almost a holy light.

"You must ask that question of your mother, Miss Moriatty," replies Lewis, coloring. "You know what *my* answer would be. But she may consider it too far for you to walk, or the day too warm."

"Not if *you* say it isn't. But I will ask her, and if you will wait a few minutes, Doctor Vangel, whilst Handy-side puts up a basket for Mrs. Morrison, we will take it over to Fuller's Field in the pony chaise."

Of course Lewis makes no objection, and Mrs. Moriatty is quite astonished to hear the animated tones in which May asks her permission to accompany Doctor Vangel to his patient, and to see the alacrity with which she takes her seat in the pony chaise, not perceiving that the anxiety of her daughter to kill thought has only taken another turn. But it appears to be a lasting one, for day after day Mary Moriatty goes on her round of visiting, appearing to find more pleasure in sitting and talking to Sarah Luke, or reading to Ellen Thrupp, the consumptive girl, or nursing poor Mrs. Morrison's little baby (to whom *she insists upon standing as sponsor*), than in the society

of the Newhams, or Taylors, or any other of her former friends. She sees them now—she can scarcely avoid doing so—but she never seeks their company, nor invites them to enjoy hers. When her mother urges her to issue her girlish invitations for a little dance or a garden party, she visibly recoils from the idea, and says it is too much trouble. Yet she is always ready to see Lewis Vangel, and pleased when she hears he is coming to dinner, and the fact is naturally noticed by both her parents.

"That young fellow seems always here now, having long talks with our Mary," remarks Mr. Moriarty one evening late in September, as he and his wife sit together in the drawing-room after dinner.

The French windows are open, for the weather is still warm, and, through the foliage of the trees that skirt the lawn, they can just distinguish the flutter of May's white dress as she saunters to and fro, with Lewis Vangel by her side.

"Yes, they are great friends over their parish matters. I daresay they are discussing their patients now," replies Mrs. Moriarty.

"Nonsense. I don't believe anything of the sort," says her husband. "Good-looking young men don't hang about pretty girls day after day to talk over old men's backaches and old women's rheumatism. Vangel's sweet on her, there's no doubt of that, but if they're going to make a match of it, why doesn't he speak out? I hate to see a fellow fooling after a girl for months without daring to open his mouth. If he wants her, let him say so, like a man."

"My dear Dan, I have told you before that Lewis Vangel will never propose to May again. He is too proud in the first instance, and too poor in the second. He is afraid we shall consider him a fortune-hunter. He said so to me plainly."

"That's all rubbish, pussy. The only question is, does Mary like him?"

"I think she does. I believe, if he proposed again to-morrow, she would say *yes*."

"Then why don't *you* bring it about for them."

"Dan! how could I? We cannot be *sure*, and I might compromise my girl's dignity for nothing. No. If any one moves in the matter, it must be yourself. If you could let Lewis know, in a roundabout way, that you would approve of the marriage, and that his want of fortune would be no drawback, I think he would take heart and speak to her again. I believe May begins to see his value, and as for me—oh! I should *love* to have him for a son-in-law. He is a perfect darling, and nothing less."

"If you and May have made up your minds about it, I don't suppose *I* need put in an oar," remarks Mr. Moriarty grimly; "however, I'll let the boy see we have no objection to him on the score of his poverty, and then he can bring his pride down, or not, as he thinks fit. But, if he means nothing by it I won't have any more of his philandering, pussy, mind that. Mary is only just getting over her first trouble (whatever it may have been) and I am not going to see her plunged into another. These silly girls are all heart, and ready to take the first man who presents himself."

Mrs. Moriarty is thoughtful for a few moments, and then she says,—

"Dan, perhaps you had better speak plainly to Doctor Vangel at once, and settle the matter one way or the other. I *know* he loves her, but I'm not so sure about her loving him. A few words may put matters straight between them, and, any way, they can't hurt our girl, nor him either, that I can see. And if it's *not* to be, well, the sooner we know it the better, for he *is* here a good deal certainly, and I think the village has had its say about them *already*."

"I don't care a hang about the village, I'm only think-

ing about my girl," replies her husband, and, in accordance with their mutual decision, when Mary and her mother are retiring for the night, and Lewis (who has dined with them) is about to take his leave, Mr. Moriarty refuses to let him go.

"Not just yet, Vangel," he pleads. "Stay and have a smoke and a chat with me. The ladies monopolize you to that extent that I never can get a word in now-a-days. Here, pussy, tell Stephens to bring me in my slippers and some brandy and soda, and take yourself and your daughter off as speedily as you can."

"You are very polite, papa, I must say," exclaims May, laughing. (She *can* laugh again, upon occasions, by this time, though she is not (and she never will be) the gay, light-hearted May of old.) "I could find a lot more to say to Doctor Vangel myself, if you had not 'shunted' me in this unceremonious manner."

"I think you've said quite enough to Doctor Vangel for one evening," returns her father, "and he must be pretty well tired of your silly prattle."

"Another compliment," says May, as she leaves the room in company with her mother.

The two men draw their easy chairs opposite each other, and settle themselves down for half-an-hour's smoke.

"You seem to be very great friends with my daughter, Vangel," observes Mr. Moriarty.

The young man colors painfully. He has not by any means got over his fatal attachment for Mary Moriarty; but, since her return to Withyslea, he has systematically crushed the idea that she will ever be anything more to him than a friend—not because he is convinced his suit is hopeless, but because he does not wish it to succeed.

He has guessed the reason of her illness, and the alteration in her. She has had a disappointment in love, and *he is too proud to wish to step into another man's cast-*

off shoes. He has tried to be her friend as well as her doctor, and to cure her mental with her physical disorders; but he has had no intention (whilst doing so) of curing her for himself. He has put the thought away, as he believes that Mary has, and has no wish to revive it. But there is a significance in Mr. Moriarty's voice, as he makes the above observation, which is unmistakable, and sends all the blood rushing to poor Lewis's face in dread of what may be coming next, yet he answers it as if he perceived nothing unusual in the words.

"Yes; I am proud to say I think Miss Moriarty does regard me as a friend. It is the greatest honor a woman can confer upon a man. Don't you agree with me?"

"Humph! Perhaps, when it doesn't go any further. But I think it's rather a dangerous game to play when both the parties are young and free."

"Mr. Moriarty, I hope you don't imagine——" Lewis commences; but the remembrance of the past makes him change his sentence. "I can assure you," he says, "that I have never spoken a word to your daughter that you might not have listened to."

"I can quite believe that, my dear fellow. You're a man of honor, and my Mary's a good girl. I'm not in the least afraid of what you may say to one another. And if you have 'spooned' her a little, where's the harm?—always supposing you're in earnest. My daughter is free to make her own choice, and, so long as she chooses a good man, I shall second it."

"But you forget, sir, in the kindness of your heart," replies Lewis, in an agitated voice, "that I am not free to make mine. I have no money to support a wife—no prospects to look forward to. No man in his senses would accept me for a son-in-law. I am one of the unfortunate but safe tribe of ineligibles——"

"I wasn't speaking of you, but of my daughter, Vangel. *I said she is free to marry a poor man, if she chooses to*

do so. I have made a pile of money, and Mary will be a rich woman when I die. My income averages nine to ten thousand a year, and I can well afford to be a little generous. The day my daughter marries, I shall settle twenty thousand pounds upon her, so that she and her husband will be comfortably off, even during my lifetime."

"And he (if he should be penniless) will have to live upon *her* money. Not an enviable position," replies Lewis, somewhat bitterly.

"Not at all. I shall settle it upon them equally, to revert in case of death, to the survivor."

"You will place your prospective son-in-law under a heavy obligation to yourself in any case."

"We are all under obligations to some one else, Vangel. Very few of us have carved our own fortunes. Even those who *have* (as in my own case), are under an obligation to the man who first assisted them to accomplish it. Now, I am going to put a straightforward question to you. Do you care for my daughter?"

"As a friend, Mr. Moriatty—yes," replies Lewis, with clenched teeth.

"I fancied there was something more between you than mere friendship, Vangel. Forgive my plain speaking, but where there is so much talking and confidence and going about together between young people, we elders are apt to imagine they are growing fond of one another."

"I am sure Miss Moriatty has no such idea in her head," replies Lewis hurriedly. "I trust I have not been indiscreet with regard to her, Mr. Moriatty, but she has had her mother's sanction for every little walk or talk she has taken with me."

"Ah! my wife would like to see a match between you," says *his* host. "We're plain people, you see, Vangel, risen from the ranks (as some might think), and what we say we

mean. My wife likes you—so do I—and if May took a fancy to you, we shouldn't say *no*. Now, that's the real reason I began this talk with you to-night. If you love my girl, and she loves you, don't let your position nor your pride prevent your speaking out and making her happy, and we'll smooth over any little difficulties that may stand in the way."

"I don't know," commences Lewis, speaking very slowly and deliberately, "I don't know, Mr. Moriaty, how to thank you sufficiently for the trust and confidence you have placed in me, nor the kindness with which you have expressed yourself towards me. I have said something of this kind already to Mrs. Moriaty. But has she not told you—what I confided to her—that I spoke to your daughter some time since on this subject, and she refused me."

"My wife did tell me so ; but she thinks (and so do I) that May has re-considered her answer to you, and repented it."

"I don't think she has," is Lewis's reply. "I am *sure* it is not so."

"Why? Have you asked her again?"

"Certainly not. I passed my word to her mother that I would not—in fact, that I had lost all desire to do so."

"You have ceased to care for her, then?"

"That is not the question, Mr. Moriaty. *She* has never cared for me, and I was a fool to think otherwise. And—and I have tutored myself to believe it is for the best. The very fact of our present intimacy is a proof that any other sort of feeling is dead between us."

"But *if* she loved you, Vangel?"

For a moment Lewis does not answer. The thought of what the world would look like, *if* May loved him, makes his brain whirl. But she does not love him. She loves another. The remembrance brings him down from *heaven to earth*.

"It is useless to discuss the question, Mr. Moriatty. The fact remains—she does not."

"If at any time you perceive she *does*," continued the old man doggedly, "and you feel you can return it, remember that you will have my ready consent. I like you, Lewis Vangel. I do more, I admire and esteem you, and if this fancy of mine never comes to pass, I shall still always look on you as a sort of son, and make your interests my care. Now, do we understand each other?"

"I know that you have said words to me to-night, sir, that I can never forget, nor be sufficiently grateful for."

"But don't break my girl's heart."

Lewis smiles bitterly.

"There is no fear of that, Mr. Moriatty. But if you don't approve of her going amongst the cottagers so freely, say so."

"I would trust her anywhere with you."

"Thank you. I will never abuse your confidence."

And then they shake hands, and bid each other "good-night," and the younger man goes home more perplexed than ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

SCOTCHED, NOT SLAIN.

Most young men of the present day, especially impecunious ones, would have been delighted at such a proposal. The hand of the girl they love, with twenty thousand pounds in it, and the cordial consent (almost the entreaties) of both her parents. It reads like a chapter out of a fairy tale. But it is no fairy tale to Lewis Vangel. A few months ago it might have been; a few months ago, *when he first awoke* to the knowledge that he loved Mary Moriatty, he would have hailed the proposal suggested to

him as a foretaste of heaven. But now everything is changed. He is so unlike the young men of his century, that the prospect of twenty thousand pounds has no power to gild the shadow that enshrouds him. He is thinking, as he returns home that night, not of the money, nor the connection, nor the difference this marriage might make in his own future, but of the woman—the woman *pur et simple*. If he were assured to-morrow that what her parents suppose is true, that May regrets her hasty answer to his suit, and is ready to rescind it—would he accept the offer of her hand, knowing (what he feels now he does know) that her heart has been lost in the interim to another man? His first decision is decidedly *no*. Not for the mines of Golconda, nor all the gold of Ophir, would he care to catch a heart in the rebound. But here arises another question. Has sweet May Moriarty's heart been lost during her absence from Withyslea, or have her senses only been attracted by some charm of manner or appearance in the other sex, which she is already prepared to pronounce fallacious? In that case, however mistaken—however disappointed—however ashamed and crestfallen, is not the *woman* in her as worthy of his love as before? Lewis Vangel holds another theory—extraordinary in a man. He believes that the weaker vessel (because she *is* the weaker) should be judged in all things the most leniently, and that it is only a coward who lays the blame of his own want of self-control on the woman whose charms have tempted him to forget what is due to himself. In his own person, he would scorn to let the least particle of blame rest on a creature committed, on account of her very weakness, to his especial protection. He has the spirit regarding it that made the martyrs walk up to the stake without the quiver of a single nerve, and would die in silence sooner than betray the friend who trusted in him. He has nothing but contempt for the ignoble curs that infest our clubs and throughfares to-day, and boast

of the miserable conquests they may, or may not, have achieved over the silly members of the feminine sex. He fears it is some poltroon of this sort who has, for awhile, alienated poor Mary's heart from her people and her home, and he feels for her disappointment as much as for his own. But if her heart should turn to him for consolation, has he the courage to try and heal the wound? He loves the girl dearly, and yet he shrinks from her. She has become to him like a garment that some one else has worn. The freshness—the simplicity, the purity that hung about her like the morning mist and the fragrant air, and the drop of dew upon the rose leaf, seem all to have disappeared. He knows she is as sweet and as pretty as ever (prettier, indeed, for trouble, if it has robbed her face of some of its roundness, has imparted a spirituality it never possessed before), but it was neither her face nor her figure he fell in love with. It was the frank, noble disposition he had watched unfolding year by year, as she grew from a child into a woman. Is that all gone? He cannot believe it, and if it has been chastened and overclouded, who should help her to regain her old strength of character and purity of purpose if not those who love and cherish her? Lewis Vangel has a great idea of love, and a greater one of marriage. He does not believe that half of the men and women whose hands are joined in church are ever married at all. Their bodies are bound to live together for life, whilst their spirits grow in opposite directions, and are never united. Should he ever marry, he has hoped to take part in a very different sort of union.

But there is another side of the argument. Love owes a duty not only to the creature who is loved, but to the soul from which it emanates. Lewis feels that love is not meant alone for pleasure. It confers a secret obligation on one's self. How then (he asks inwardly) does he love *May Moriaty*? Is it for her good, or his own? Does he *love her simply* to possess her, or to raise her up to be

the highest object of his earthly adoration? Not the former, surely, since the very idea that she has bestowed her affection on another man makes his blood curdle in his veins, and his feelings turn against the thought of obtaining the summit of his ambition. And if the latter—if his love is to raise *her* before himself—then the obligation still remains, because the need is greater. This is an unheard-of style of reasoning on the part of a young man and a lover, but it is the transcript of what passes through Lewis's brain on the present occasion. He does not go straight home, but walks up and down the neighboring fields for hours, trying to solve this problem for himself. The path before him (as far as outward prospects go) is as smooth as a polished floor. The gods seem to be pouring their favors on him unsolicited. He honestly believes that, if he were to lay himself out to make May fond of him, he would succeed, for she never seems so happy as in his presence. She follows his advice with scrupulosity, and constantly appeals to him for guidance—even (furtively) for consolation. She is becoming almost as well known amongst the sick and the poor as he is, and he hears the praises of her kindness and generosity echoed everywhere. "The little Miss from the Manor seems quite changed like," the cottagers tell him, and Lewis knows that the change has been wrought by himself. May is more cheerful, too—more equable in her spirits, and less disposed to be introspective and depressed. The look of fear with which she returned home has entirely disappeared. Some great terror has gone out of her life, carrying wakeful nights and loss of appetite with it, and the girl (with the exception of a gentle melancholy) is herself again. And with her recovery has revived all her old affection for her parents, and her ease with Lewis Vangel. He thinks, and rightly, although he is a marvelously modest man, that he might go in now and win. *But he resolves*, during that midnight stroll, that he will

not attempt it. The marriage (should it ever come to pass) must be one of May's own making. She must come to him and tell him, not in so many words, perhaps, but by look, and tone, and manner, that she *needs* his love and his protection to make her future happy—that, though the sparkle and the froth of the champagne may be gone, she will give him to drink of the strengthening wine to her life's end. If May can humble herself thus, he thinks (but he never believes she will), he will say to her (metaphorically, of course),—

“Come, dear fellow creature, who has suffered in equal measure with myself. Let us try so to spend these short lives together, that eternity may only prove a prolongation of our unstained affection.”

And yet, while he argues thus (and honestly, too) with himself, Lewis's young heart throbs with the thought of what *may be*. He cannot settle the question finally that night; Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty's wishes and confidences keep revolving themselves over and over in his mind, until he becomes puzzled and confused, and deliberately shuts them out. It must rest now entirely with May, he says, as he lies down to rest; but no rest comes to his excited spirit. What May will say or do is the next thing that worries and keeps him waking, until he wishes the parent birds had not interfered in the matter, but left his fate and hers to work itself out, as the gods directed. He is up with the dawn the following morning, but he is resolved not to go near the Manor House, unless he is especially summoned there. He avoids, too, as much as possible, the places where he is likely to meet Mary Moriarty, and runs, in consequence, in the face of a worse evil, an encounter with Mrs. Crosbie. The residents of Withyslea are divided into two factions, the high churchmen and the dissenters; they used to be united before *the Reverend Andrew Crosbie* came amongst them. *Under their late Vicar*, old Mr. Bond, the villagers tramped

in a body to the parish church, and comfortably slumbered through the service, while he buzzed away at the prayers and sermon like a bumble-bee in a bottle. But their spirits rose at Mr. Crosbie's innovations; they thought the candles and the flowers on the altar an improvement, and they would have been puzzled to explain the harm of vestments and early services, but their spirits rose all the same. The British brain, which is mostly composed of gruel, and very thick gruel into the bargain, possesses a grand faculty of opposing everything it doesn't understand. It is quite sufficient to present a new idea to an Englishman to make him quarrelsome; his head is not capable of holding more than one at a time, and whilst he is stirring up his gruel, and trying to become familiar with the new one, he is obstinate, bigotted, and disagreeable; he never believes that any one can know better than himself, in fact he is, as a rule, just what other civilized nations call him, a pig-headed islander, who values his flesh and his muscle above his brain, and is content to stand crowing on his dunghill, and calling on the rest of the world to see what a very fine fellow he is. There *may* be intelligent and well-made men, he thinks, amongst the Americans, and the Germans, and the French, but it is quite a freak of nature when they are so, and no nation in the aggregate can come up to the beef-eating, beer-drinking Briton. And so he goes on, making a beast of himself above all other men, by drinking, and striking and insulting women; and lets Germany outstrip him in mechanical trade, and America in inventive genius, and France in police government, whilst he stands with his hands in his pockets, obstinately denying that anybody can work or govern like himself. I have never visited other countries, but I have thanked Heaven there is only a very little drop of British blood in my composition. This amiable idiosyncrasy is as apparent amongst the *lower classes* as the upper. Because Mr. Crosbie's views

were new to Withyslea, Withyslea set up its bucolic back against them, without waiting to test their value, and deserted the church for the dissenting chapel, which soon reared its modest head amongst them, on the lookout for discontented sheep from the established flock. Some of the laboring classes, whose worldly interests clashed with their religious views, remained with the Vicar, and all the gentry of Withyslea attended the parish church, but half Mrs. Crosbie's time was engaged in her attempts to beat up recruits to fill the vacant places, and she bore a bitter grudge against the dissenters and any one who befriended them. She catches sight of Lewis Vangel, on the occasion I am writing of, as he issues from the cottage of William Thrupp, one of the most prominent opponents of the Vicar's ritualistic opinions, and crosses the road in order to address him.

"Good-morning, Doctor Vangel. I trust no one is seriously ill in Thrupp's family? They are all in a very hardened and unprepared condition."

Lewis is naturally compelled to stop, though he would gladly have avoided her.

"Ellen Thrupp has been ill for a long time, Mrs. Crosbie, and I expect her decease to take place at any moment. But I have not observed anything hardened about her."

"I don't know how you could see anything else in a person who obstinately refuses the offices of Holy Church," replies Mrs. Crosbie, with a sniff. "However, if the young woman is really ill, it is my duty to try and bring her to a sense of her true condition. I suppose I can go in now?"

"I would not advise you to do so, Mrs. Crosbie. I would not answer for what Thrupp might say to you. He is a rough-tongued old man, you know, and is rather *bitter at present*, on account of his impending loss. Besides, Mr. Jackson, the dissenting minister, is praying with *Ellen now*."

"Just the very reason I should be present to try and correct some of his pernicious doctrine. Do you really think, Doctor Vangel, that I would shirk a sacred duty from fear of what an irreligious old man might say to me? You don't know what a *Churchwoman* can do in the cause of religion."

"I have no doubt of your zeal, Mrs. Crosbie, but you will not get beyond the ground floor, if you get inside the door," replies Lewis. "Thrupp is keeping guard in the kitchen, and I know he won't let you pass. I heard him say so."

Mrs. Crosbie looks a little staggered.

"Exceedingly impertinent of him," she ejaculates, after a pause. "And so he will let his poor daughter die without the solace of a woman's presence (for she has no mother, you know) sooner than abate one jot of his bigotry and ignorance. Just like those dissenters. The true light never shines upon them; they obstinately shut it out."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Crosbie, but I am glad to say poor Ellen is not without consolation in her illness. Miss Moriatty has been more like a friend to her than a benefactress for weeks past, and has promised to go to her at any moment she may be summoned."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Vicar's wife, tossing her head, "she's one of Miss Moriatty's 'pets,' is she? I suppose Miss Moriatty is in there at the present moment, and that accounts for *your* interest in the case," with a searching look at the young doctor.

Lewis has to make an effort to keep his temper.

"She is not there," he answers, "and I have not seen her to-day."

"Doubtless you will, though, before the day is over. I hear that Miss Moriatty has developed quite a new taste for visiting the poor. She has never done it before to *my* knowledge. And they say it is all your sick people *she is so especially attentive to*, Doctor Vangel."

"Do they?" says Lewis carelessly. "They're sure to be right, whoever they are. And I, for my part, am infinitely obliged to any lady who will take compassion on my sick people. I think, Mrs. Crosbie, that if we were to look after our neighbors' *bodies* a little more sometimes, we might leave their souls to look after themselves."

"Oh, but that is quite a blasphemous doctrine, Doctor Vangel, and I, as the Vicar's wife, cannot possibly permit it to pass unrebuked. But if Miss Moriatty wishes to turn over a new leaf (and, I fear, there is room for it)——"

"What do you mean by that?" cries Lewis fiercely.

"Oh, now, Doctor Vangel, don't look at me in that terrible manner. We all know that you are on *very* intimate terms at the Manor House, but you need not bite off my head for a simple suggestion. All I meant was, that Mary Moriatty has led rather an indolent and pleasure-seeking life up to the present, and I am thankful to see a change for the better in her."

"You should say just what you mean, then, Mrs. Crosbie," rejoins Lewis sternly.

The Vicar's wife is rather flustered. She does not like his look, or tone of voice.

"But why didn't she come to *me* if she felt a desire to do good in the parish?" she continues, rather nervously.

"Her father and mother are good church people (though they may not attend the services as often as we could wish to see them), and give liberally to our various charities, so why should their daughter waste her time (and, doubtless, her money) on a parcel of thoughtless dissenters, when I could have put her in the way of benefiting such as really deserve both help and sympathy? A few walks round the village with me and my little basket," playfully tapping a plaited straw bag she carries on her arm, "would have made Miss Moriatty acquainted with our most worthy parishioners, and I could have given her many hints as to the best way to say the right word at the right season."

‘Doubtless, Mrs. Crosbie, but I fancy Miss Moriatty prefers her own way of doing things. And as to dissenters and churchmen, I feel sure that the religious opinions of her poor friends would make no difference in her attention. I doubt if she has even alluded to them. She visits them to comfort and console them in their needs, not to interfere with their private feelings.”

“That’s some of *your* teaching, I suppose, Doctor Vangel, but it is none the less unjustifiable. I have heard that Mary Moriatty actually stood sponsor for that woman Morrison’s baby, and that it was baptized in the dissenting chapel. Now, that is an actual scandal ; everybody has been commenting upon it. But perhaps it is not true.”

“Oh, yes, it *is* true,” replies Lewis smiling. “Mrs. Morrison had no sponsors for her little boy, and so Miss Moriatty and I stood for him. It was a very undignified proceeding, wasn’t it? But it gave the poor widowed mother great satisfaction, as she imagines now that we have made ourselves, in a measure, responsible for the youngster’s temporal as well as spiritual welfare. And Miss Moriatty has grown so fond of her godchild, she is already counting on the time when she will be able to put him into buttons, and promote him to be her tiger.”

“And when so many estimable and God-fearing mothers would be grateful to have such a prospect before their infants. Dear, dear, it is very sad,” remarks Mrs. Crosbie, “but, I suppose, Miss Moriatty has *your* sanction for her erratic proceedings, Doctor Vangel, and that is sufficient for her.”

“My sanction?” repeats Lewis, coloring.

“Yes, your sanction. Do you suppose that Withyslea is blind and deaf? Mary Moriatty’s illness was a very good excuse for a time, Doctor Vangel, but she is not ill enough now, at all events, to account for your daily visits to the Manor House. And so she trots after you *everywhere*, and meets you in the houses of your pa-

tients. Well, it is very pleasant, doubtless, and very agreeable when people's tastes assimilate so nicely; and I suppose it will end in the usual way, with a peal of wedding bells."

Lewis has been growing very white during this harangue, as he bites his under-lip and tries to keep down his rising temper.

"Mrs. Crosbie," he says, when she has finished, "you are assuming a fact which you have no right even to hint at. I sincerely trust you have not been linking the names of Miss Moriaty and myself in this unwarrantable fashion before other people. If so I must beg you will contradict what you have said. There is no foundation whatever for such a rumor. Mr. and Mrs. Moriaty have extended their friendship to me in a most gratifying manner, and there is nothing between their daughter and myself but what the world is cognizant of."

"Oh, well, when a lady and gentleman are seen so constantly together, people will *talk*, you know," exclaims Mrs. Crosbie, with a nervous laugh.

"Yes, I am perfectly aware that people will talk, Mrs. Crosbie, but our *friends* do not repeat or encourage the scandal. We are all talked of, more or less, according to our individual importance, from the king upon his throne down to his lackey. Even *you* might not care to hear me repeat the gossip I have heard concerning yourself."

The Vicar's wife grows scarlet. She tries to stare the young man out of countenance, and dare him to justify his words, but the attempt is a failure. Her usually pale face is burning, and her hand shakes, as she professes to arrange the different articles in her basket.

"*About me?*" she ejaculates, with a ghastly smile. "What can anyone have to say of *me*—the Vicar's wife? It is ridiculous, incredible. My whole life is a refutation of idle gossip. Besides, who would *dare*——"

"*Oh, lots of people will dare to do it*, Mrs. Crosbie, if

you only give them the occasion," replies Lewis, who is enjoying her evident confusion. "Just as you have perverted Miss Moriarty's kind wish to alleviate the sufferings and troubles of her poorer neighbors into a desire for my unworthy company, so will others pervert your purest actions if you afford them the slightest loophole for doing so. Perhaps you would like to hear some of the things that Withyslea says about you, Mrs. Crosbie?"

"No, certainly not," exclaims the lady hurriedly, as she prepares to leave her tormentor; "Mr. Crosbie would be exceedingly angry with me if he heard I had allowed you to repeat them. It cannot concern *me*, Doctor Vangel. It must be some vile falsehood, concocted of malice and envy. I know that I have been placed, by the goodness of Heaven, and not for my own worthiness, in an exalted and enviable position, and that many an evil-minded person might be tempted, for that very reason, to cast a stone at me. But I am conscious of the purity of my intentions, and I defy them."

"I am glad to hear you say so. It is just what I do myself," replies Lewis, smiling as she passes him with a very ill-tempered countenance, and hastens out of sight. But, as she disappears, so does his smile.

"I have 'scotched' that viper for a while," he thinks; "but the rumor will burst out in a dozen different places. If I don't take some means to contradict it, these old women of Withyslea, with their long tongues and their empty heads, will force May and me into marriage before we know where we are; and that would be a nice return on my part for all her dear parents' kindness and trust in me. I will not go near the Manor House for another week."

When he reaches home that afternoon, he finds a note from Mrs. Moriarty on the table, asking why he has not been to see them for so many days past, and begging *him to go and help them eat a haunch of venison that evening.*

"I hope you will go, my dear," says his mother who has read the note before his return.

"Why? Are you so anxious to get rid of me?"

"No; of course not. But we have only some beef sausages for dinner to-day, and I know you dislike them. I couldn't help it. The weather is so damp, and warm, the cold meat was quite tainted, and Cross, the butcher, had nothing but sausages left."

"They'll do well enough, mother. You know I'm not particular about what I eat. But I'm too busy to go out to-day."

"What a pity! *Make* the time, Lewis. A haunch of venison, too! You don't often get such a treat. And what particular business have you to attend to this evening?"

"Any amount," he answers vaguely; "I might be summoned to poor Ellen Thrupp, at a moment's warning. She is just in that condition, when it is impossible to say how long she may last, nor how soon she may go."

"Well, dear, I can send the messenger on to the Manor House for you. There's nothing easier."

"No, mother! I cannot go. Let me know my own business best. Can Sarah run over with my answer? And then we'll fall to on the sausages, for I'm hungry."

He passes a cheerful evening with his old mother, making her happy, by playing her favorite game of bezique with her, and listening to her rambling stories of by-gone days, and retires to rest at ten o'clock, satisfied that, if not the most pleasant, it was the wisest thing to do.

But when he has slept for perhaps a couple of hours, he is roused by a loud ringing of the surgery bell, and, in answer to his inquiries from the open window, hears the voice of Billy Thrupp, Ellen's little brother, calling out,—

"*Please, sir, father sez, will you come as quick as you can to sister, 'cause she's been took much wuss ever since nine o'clock, and he sez he thinks she's a-going' fast.*"

CHAPTER XV.

ELLEN THRUPP'S DEATH.

LEWIS tells the child to run back and assure his father he will be with him as soon as is possible, and then dresses himself and goes downstairs, holding his boots in his hand. A nocturnal summons is an unusual event in Withyslea, and he would not for the world have his mother's rest unnecessarily disturbed. He looks at his watch. The hands point to a quarter to one. "She will die with the dawn," he thinks to himself, as he replaces it in his pocket. He creeps into the surgery to procure a bottle of stimulating tincture that may be of use, and passes thence into the open air. The year is now upon its wane. October has arrived, and the night feels almost chilly—the very night to send a consumptive patient adrift on that mysterious journey that lands us in another world. Lewis sighs as he hastens to the side of the dying girl. He is not yet hardened enough in his profession to take life and death as matters of course. As he reaches the cottage he sees Thrupp, with his pipe in his mouth, leaning with folded arms against the lintel of the open door.

"You told me to send for you, sir," he says, as Lewis comes up to him, "or I would not have troubled you to turn out at this time o' night, for you can't do her no good. She's goin' as fast as she can—gallopin', as you may say. It's all over with my poor lass."

"I know I can't do her any lasting good, Thrupp," replies Lewis gently. "I told you that long ago, my poor fellow ; but I may be able to ease her last moments, if she should be in any pain."

"You was allays good to us from the beginning, sir."

says the man, in a gruff voice, which is assumed to hide his emotion, "and I sha'n't never forget it, and I'm glad you should be here just now, for it fairly skeers me."

"Is any one with her, Thrupp?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Jenkins and Mrs. Luke are upstairs, and I was glad to get away. I can't stand seeing my poor gal pluckin' at the counterpane, and sayin' there's smuts fallin' in the air. It's an awful thing to see one's own flesh and blood dyin' by inches. I thought I had suffered all I could when her poor mother went, but this seems wuss, somehow."

Lewis makes no answer, but he goes up to the old man and presses his rough hand in his own. Thrupp returns the clasp with a force that is almost painful, and then, thrusting his knuckles into his eyes, strolls a few steps away from the cottage door. Lewis enters it, and climbs the creaking little staircase to an upper chamber, where poor Ellen, amidst the discomforts of poverty, is drawing her last breath.

"Oh, here's the doctor! He'll know what'll do her good, poor dear," exclaim the two women who are watching her, as they rise upon his entrance.

Ellen is lying upon her pillows, with her glassy eyes wide open, staring at some imaginary object which she tries every now and then to clutch with her attenuated fingers, but which seems as often to elude her grasp. The other hand is constantly occupied with plucking at the patch-work counterpane which covers her, and as she restlessly occupies herself, she keeps on murmuring some words beneath her breath. The young doctor sees at once that she is dying, and cannot last many hours, but it is his duty to keep her in the world as long as he can, and so he takes out the stimulant he has brought with him, and proceeds to pour some drops of it into a glass of water.

"How long has she been like this?" he asks of one of the women.

'All night, sir. She was took very faint and bad about nine o'clock, and Thrupp he fetched me over, and she begun to pick at the coverlet at ten. I told him then as 'twas all up with her, for I've seen a many go in my time, but he wouldn't believe me till he found she didn't know him no more, and then he sent Billy off for you.'

"What is she saying?"

"That's what me and Mrs. Luke can't make out, sir, but I don't think she's got her senses, poor dear."

"Oh, yes, she has, and hears every word you say, so be cautious," replies Lewis. "Can't you see how her eyes are watching my movements? Drink this, Ellen," he continues, holding the glass to the lips of the sick girl, as he raises her head with his disengaged arm, "it will do you good. That's right. And now, are you comfortable? Is there anything you wish for?"

She turns her glazing eyes upon him, and repeats the same words she has been murmuring all along, "*Send for her.*"

He has to bend down his ear to her mouth to catch them, and her breath blows like a cold blast upon his face. But he is able to interpret her meaning.

"*Send for her!*" he repeats, "of course I will. But who am I to send for, Ellen? Tell me her name."

The stimulant has had its effect, and she can articulate more plainly now.

"Miss—Moriaty."

"Lor! she wants the young lady from the Manor House," cries Mrs. Luke.

Lewis starts. It is nearly two o'clock. How can he summon May out of her warm bed at that hour? It would be too unreasonable. What would her parents say?

"Send—for—her," repeats the dying girl imploringly.

And yet for a departing soul! For some one who will be dust and ashes in a few short hours. Surely he cannot refuse a last request, nor would he be justified in

depriving May of exercising the virtue of self-denial. He is sorely perplexed, but at last determines to leave it to Mrs. Moriatty's decision. Hastily scribbling a note in pencil, he sends little Billy running off with it to the Manor House. The words he sends are characteristic of him:—

“DEAR MRS. MORIATY,—Ellen Thrupp is dying. She cannot last till morning. I write this from her bed-side. She keeps on incessantly asking for your daughter. What is to be done? You must decide. I have neither the presumption to summon Miss Moriatty at this time of night, nor the heart to refuse a dying girl's request. I leave it in your hands. LEWIS VANGEL.”

It takes longer to rouse Mrs. Moriatty from her slumbers and make her understand what all the commotion is about than it did the young doctor, but, when the good woman is thoroughly awake, she melts into tears over the sadness of it all.

“Oh, Dan, my dear, I must get up at once and take our Mary down to see poor Ellen Thrupp before she dies. Saunders, go and wake Miss Mary, and help her to dress as quickly as possible. Now, Dan, it's no use trying to prevent me. Would you have me lie here comfortably asleep, and May too, whilst that poor child dies without seeing her again? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. There, turn round and go to sleep, and be thankful they don't want you! May and I will be safe enough. We'll take Saunders with us, and Lewis Vangel will be there, so we can't come to any harm. Is Miss Mary ready, Saunders? That's right. And now, put on your warm cloak, and come down the road with me. God help us all, when we lay dying, if we can't take a little trouble *for a fellow-creature* at a time like this.”

And so, between talking and crying, the motherly

woman gets her little convoy under sail, and arrives at Thrupp's cottage long before Lewis expected an answer to his appeal. He goes down into the sanded kitchen to meet them, and thank them for their alacrity. May is very pale, and her eyes show traces of emotion, but Lewis thinks he has never seen her look so beautiful. She has thrown a long furred mantle over the morning gown she has hastily assumed, and her fair hair is in considerable disorder. But what strikes him most is the complete want of concern she displays, either for her personal appearance or herself—all her thoughts being evidently concentrated on the poor girl in the chamber overhead.

"Is she *really* dying?" she whispers, as Lewis takes her hand.

"Do you think I would have troubled you to leave your bed at such an hour, if she were not?" he says reproachfully. "Indeed, I almost wonder she has survived so long, and I think it must be her earnest desire to see you again that has kept her here. The women who are with her tell me she has been repeating the words, '*Send for her!*' ever since ten o'clock, but until I arrived they could not understand what she meant."

"Poor Ellen! poor dear girl," says May, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, "do not let us waste a moment, Doctor Vangel! Take me to her at once."

"You are not afraid of what you may witness?" he says inquiringly.

May opens her eyes.

"*You* are coming with me, are you not?"

"Of course, and shall remain there to the end."

"Then why should I be afraid?" she replies, holding out her hand.

Lewis turns from her suddenly to Mrs. Moriarty, whom he had established in the family arm-chair.

"Mrs. Moriarty, will you wait here for your daughter? *I don't think you will have to wait very long.*"

"Certainly, Lewis. I shall prefer it. The poor girl upstairs doesn't want me, and I am only here on May's account. Go with her at once. She will want me, poor darling, when all is over. She has a very tender heart."

Leaving Mrs. Moriatty and her maid downstairs, the two younger people mount to the upper story. Ellen, with the quick ear of the dying, seems to have heard May's arrival, for she is sitting up in bed and bending eagerly forward as the young lady enters.

"Now, here she is, so do 'e lie down again," says Mrs. Jenkins, as she tries to force the invalid to resume her recumbent position. But Ellen sees and hears nothing but the face and footsteps of Mary Moriatty, and holds out her weak arms entreatingly to her. Lewis wonders what May will do—May, who beyond reading to them, and taking them wine, and fruit, and flowers, has never been brought in contact with the sick before. Will her womanly nature, or her training and education, prove the stronger of the two, and will she hold back at this supreme moment, startled by the unexpected familiarity, forgetful that death levels all stations, and makes the beggar equal with the king; or will she think of nothing except that a dying woman appeals to her for affection? It all passes in a moment, but he feels as if his fate hung upon the result, and he is not kept long in suspense. Mary Moriatty no sooner realizes that the dying embrace is meant for her, than (throwing off her furred cloak) she darts forward and folds Ellen Thrupp, the laborer's daughter, closely in her arms.

"Oh, my poor Ellen!" she exclaims; "if I had known you were so ill, I would have stayed with you all day."

And then she bends her fresh young face over that of the expiring girl, and kisses her softly on the brow, and cheeks, and chin.

"Dear Ellen," she whispers, "you are very happy! *You are going to God! I wish I was going with you, dear, but we shall meet again up there, and be better friends than we ever were below.*"

And again May kisses her softly, whilst Ellen's head lies on her bosom, and her wasted arms are clasped about her neck.

"I—knew—you—would—come!" she murmurs at length, in the hollow whisper of the dying, whilst her eyes are fixed on May, and her pallid lips part in a feeble smile.

"Ain't it a picture?" exclaims Mrs. Luke and Mrs. Jenkins, as they stand and gaze upon the two girls folded in each other's embrace. Lewis Vangel can hardly trust himself to look at them, but he feels at that moment as if he loved May better than he ever did before.

"I wanted you," continues Ellen painfully; "you have been so good to me, my best friend, I shall never forget it."

"Indeed, Ellen, it is nothing, you have been *my* friend too," replies May; "and if I have been of any use to you, it was not my doing, but Doctor Vangel's. He brought me here, you know, and asked me to be your friend."

"Good-bye, doctor, and thank you," says the dying girl.

He takes her hand, and holds it for a moment. The sands of life are running down very, *very* fast.

"I owe everything to Doctor Vangel," continues May brokenly; "I did nothing with my life before he showed me the way, but I would have done anything to save yours, dear Ellen."

But Ellen's head has slightly fallen back, and she has closed her eyes, as though too weary to speak any more.

"Doctor Vangel," exclaims May to Lewis, who is measuring out some more drops, with his back towards her, "she is very still; I do not think she hears me, has she fainted or gone to sleep?"

He turns at her remark and comes back to the bedside.

"Gone to sleep, Miss Moriaty," he answers quietly; "*lay her down, poor girl. It is all over.*"

May stares at him with a scared look.

"*All over!* Is she really gone—dead?"

"She is really gone," he says, as he takes the corpse from her arms, and lays it reverently back upon the pillows.

May is silent for a moment, as if trying to realize the truth, and then she bursts into a flood of tears.

"Oh, poor girl, poor Ellen, and I wanted to say so much more to her; I didn't think she would die for a long time yet, and it is only a few minutes since I came here; if we hadn't come quickly I should have been too late. Oh, my poor little friend, it seems hard to think we shall never meet again."

"Yes, that would indeed be terribly hard, if it were true," says Lewis, "but you know it is not. Come, Miss Moriatty, let me take you back to your mother; these women will do all that is necessary for poor Ellen, and Mrs. Moriatty will be uneasy if she hears you cry. She died happy for seeing you once more; that must be your consolation now."

And he tries to raise her from her kneeling position as he speaks. But she will not take her arms from the corpse, and continues to sob without intermission.

"Lor, ain't it beautiful to see sich feeling," says Mrs. Jenkins, "and I'm sure poor Ellen she ought to be proud as she 'ad sich a friend in a young lady as that."

"Miss Moriatty," whispers Lewis, "you *must* come away. It is necessary that we should leave the room."

She rises then, and is about to follow him downstairs, when the doorway is blocked up by the burly figure of James Thrupp.

"What's all the commotion about?" he asks, in a quivering voice. "Is my lass gone?"

"Yes, Thrupp, she is gone, and without pain. Be *thankful* for that," replies Lewis kindly.

"*And she died in the young lady's arms,*" adds Mrs.

Luke—"a-kissin' of 'er as if they had been two sisters."

Thrupp walks up to the bed and looks at his dead child for a moment, and then, drawing his hand across his eyes, he turns to Mary Moriaty.

"I can't never repay you," he says, in a choking voice, "not so long as I live, but I expect *she'll* pray for you in Heaven. But if ever I can serve you, Miss, if it be on my bendin' knees I'll do it—aye, if it was to take ten years off my life, and that's all I've got to say about it."

"And he means it, too. Jem Thrupp never passed his word and broke it," chimes in Mrs. Luke.

"I hopes not," he says in answer.

May goes up to the bereaved father, and puts her soft hand in his. She longs to comfort him, but she doesn't know what to say. Lewis speaks for her.

"If Miss Moriaty needed any return for what has been a pure act of love on her part, Thrupp, she would find it in your words. But she knows that she has only done her duty, as we are all bound to do it, one for another, as we go through life."

"Yes, sir, that may be very true for you and such as this young lady, but it don't hold good with every one. Who's bin near my poor gal in her trouble 'cept yerselves? Not them fine Christians from the Vicarage. Nell was a dissenter like myself, and she might perish, body and soul, before Mrs. Crosbie would come nigh 'er. But her pride will be brought down yet."

"Never mind such thoughts now, Thrupp. Your daughter would be the first to tell you to lay them aside. She has gone where no creed nor sect will signify any more, and all *we* have to do is to try and follow her, for she was a good girl, and you must feel that she is happy and at rest."

"Thank ye, sir; thank ye. You does me good," replies poor Thrupp, as he sinks down by the bedside, and covers his face with his hands.

Lewis puts May's furred cloak over her shoulders, and clasps it securely round her throat.

"Come away now," he whispers, "we can do no more here," and she follows him silently downstairs.

Poor Mrs. Moriarty is nearly asleep in the arm-chair. The church clock is striking three. Ellen's soul has risen with the dawn.

"It is all over, dear mother," cries May, as she throws herself into Mrs. Moriarty's arms. "Poor Ellen died half an hour ago, and Doctor Vangel says we had better go home."

"Oh, my dear child, it must have been a very trying scene, and I hope it has not been too much for you. Has she had anything to keep her up, Lewis? A glass of wine or a cup of tea?"

"She has had her own good sense, Mrs. Moriarty, and the satisfaction that arises from the performance of a kindly action, and that will support her better than any stimulant. I should have blushed for her if she hadn't cried a little, but a few tears will do her no harm. Neither would a cup of tea. You must take her home now and give her one. I will walk back with you to the Manor gates."

"Oh, Lewis, you are always so thoughtful, but you must be tired yourself, and in want of sleep. Why not go straight home? Saunders will be our escort, and the Manor is quite out of your way from here."

"I am going to walk back with you and your daughter to the Manor," he repeats, with gentle persistency, as he offers his arm to Mrs. Moriarty. She accepts it, and they step out into the dawn together. It is a chilly morning, and, as he breathes the air, Lewis glances furtively at May to see if her cloak is properly fastened round her.

"It will be a fine day," he remarks, looking towards the west, "but the air is cold at present. I should advise both of you ladies to turn into bed for a few hours as soon as you reach home."

"I shall make May do so, certainly," replies Mrs. Moriarty, "for I can see the dear child has been terribly upset, and she will be fit for nothing all day if she does not get some rest."

"*Rest!*" repeats May, with her swollen eyes raised towards the sky. "How strange it seems to be talking of rest and sleep after what we have just witnessed! It seems to me (for the moment) as if I should never rest again. To think that Ellen Thrupp is gone away forever—she, to whom we were speaking less than an hour ago. And then to wonder *where* she is, and if she can see us, or hear us speak! And to think the same thing will happen—*must* happen—to us all, and *may* happen at any moment! It is very awful. I have never really thought of death before."

"And yet, since (as you say) it *must* come, sooner or later, to all of us, Miss Moriarty," replies Lewis, glancing at her across her mother, "it is surely a good thing that we should familiarize ourselves with the idea."

"Mamma, why do we not oftener talk of death together?" exclaims May. "I think it would make life less hard to bear, and its difficulties seem easier."

"Oh! my darling, I really don't know. It is a sad subject, and it's no use thinking of it before it comes. And I have always tried to make your life as bright and easy to you as possible. I can't bear to see your face clouded, May, as it is now. And I shall scold Lewis if I find this melancholy visit is attended with any evil results for you."

"No, you won't," replies Lewis pleasantly. "You would have scolded yourself if you had refused to let her come. Miss Moriarty is old enough to suffer in her own person, and, therefore, she is old enough to know what suffering is. And death," he adds solemnly; "which of us is too young to think of that, when little children yield up their immortal spirits daily?"

"Lewis," exclaims Mrs. Moriarty suddenly, "no one,

to hear you talk, would think you were an irreligious man."

"Who says I am irreligious?"

"Oh! every one. At least you never go to church, you know."

"Very seldom, I admit. Yet it doesn't follow I am not a Christian."

"But most Christians go to church."

"That's begging the question. You mean I am not a Churchman. I confess it, and, moreover, I am very much afraid that, whilst the Reverend Mr. and Mrs. Crosbie hold the pulpit of Withyslea, I shall not improve in that respect."

"Well, I dislike them as much as ever you can do, Lewis."

"And I *hate* them!" interposes May emphatically.

"You go beyond me," says Lewis, smiling, "and I don't know that I am glad of it. I feel at liberty, as I am at present, to follow my own theories without doing harm to anybody else; but if—"

"If *what*, Lewis?" demands Mrs. Moriarty.

"I was going to say," he continues, with a heightened color, "that if ever I were married (which is the unlikeliest thing in the world), I should wish my wife to go to church whether I did or not. Indeed, I am not quite sure that I shouldn't go with her. But I don't feel bound to set my mother a good example, and she doesn't want it either, dear old soul!"

"I am quite sure, if ever you do marry, Lewis," says Mrs. Moriarty confidently, "that your wife will be a very happy woman, and you will make her the best of husbands."

"Thank you very much, my dear friend, in the name of the Mrs. Lewis Vangel who will never be."

"Ah! never's a long day. But here we are at the *Manor gates*. Now, won't you come in, Lewis, and have

some breakfast before you return home? You can lie down and have a sleep on one of the spare beds afterwards, if you feel so inclined."

"No, indeed, Mrs. Moriatty. Many thanks all the same. But I will look in and see how you both are later in the day, if you will allow me."

"Come to dinner. We shall all be delighted to see you."

"No, not to dinner, thank you," he replies, with his eyes on the ground.

"Why not?"

"I have work to do. I cannot give up my evenings."

But Mrs. Moriatty will not let him off.

"Do your work in the afternoon," she urges, "and come to us afterwards. My husband is quite vexed at having seen so little of you lately. It is a fortnight since you dined with us. Now, Lewis, do say 'yes.'"

He is again about to refuse, when he raises his eyes and meets those of Mary Moriatty fixed full upon him, with an expression in them he has never seen before. His will wavers. Something whispers to him to accept the invitation.

"Very well," he says; "since you are so kind as to press the matter, I will punish myself no longer, but be with you at six o'clock," and then, with many assurances of cordiality, the trio separate, and May slips her arm through that of her mother as they walk up the drive together.

"Mamma," she commences confidentially, "why do you call Doctor Vangel by his Christian name? You never did so before, and it sounds so funny."

"Why should it, dear? I am old enough to be his mother."

"But he is no relation to us."

"Unfortunately no; I wish he were. I would give anything to possess such a son or nephew as Lewis Vangel. I consider him one of the best and most estimable young

man I ever met, and she will be a very lucky woman who gets him for a husband."

May ponders for a while over this assertion before she asks,—

"*Why*, mamma?"

"Because he possesses all the virtues which are most desirable in a man. He has a tender and lovable disposition, united to a firm will and a clever brain. It is these qualities which give him so much self-control and so much influence over others. Cannot you see how men like James Thrupp look up to him, a mere lad as he is, compared to themselves? That is the proof of his mental superiority. He governs himself, and so he is capable of governing others. I consider him a young man in a thousand, and his mother says he is the best son that ever lived."

"Yes, he is very good to her. He has to give up all his pleasures to support her. It must be very hard for a young man."

"Well, let us hope he will gain the affections of some nice girl with a little money of her own. If *I* were young and had a fortune, I should consider myself honored by being permitted to help such a man on in life. But I believe girls are blind and deaf now-a-days. They will pass over a jewel like Lewis Vangel's heart to pick up some bit of worthless glass, because it glitters a little more, perhaps, and makes a bigger show."

May is trembling. She half fancies her mother must know that she has refused the young doctor's hand, and yet she dares not betray herself by asking. Besides, Mrs. Moriaty speaks almost angrily, and she may bring down the vials of her wrath upon her. But, after a pause, she ventures to ask, in a low voice,—

"Mamma! if—supposing—(I am only *supposing*, remember)—Doctor Vangel were to get fond of me, do you think papa would make any objection to it?"

"Mrs. Moriaty is overjoyed. She believes for a moment that he has spoken to May again.

"My dear girl! tell me the truth. Have you settled it between you?"

"Oh, no! no! Nothing of the sort. Only—I believe—I think, that is to say—that some day he may say something of the kind, and I should like to be sure beforehand, for I will never marry against your wishes and papa's."

"It will not be against our wishes, my darling; we should be delighted. Of course the dear boy has no money at present, but he is sure to make plenty by-and-by, and, meanwhile, you will have enough for both. Oh, May! is there any chance of its coming to pass?"

"I don't know," replies the girl despondently.

"Would you like it to do so?"

May blushes vividly.

"I think I should. I did not care for him at one time; but lately he has been so kind and good to me—so considerate of my trouble, and so forgetful of his own—that I—I—can't help feeling sorry for him."

"And you regret that you refused him, May?"

"Mamma! How do you know that?"

"Ah, you think no one knows anything but yourself. Lewis Vangel told me, my dear. He considered it only honorable to do so before he attended you in your last illness. And he loves you dearly, May, and I believe he will ask you again, if you only give him a little encouragement. Why don't you do it, my dear? A look, a word at the right time will be sufficient. You know you hurt him sorely by your refusal, and he has never got over it. He has a proud nature, and he is afraid you think he sought you because of your money. He will never speak again unless you make the opportunity for him, and let him plainly see that you have changed your mind."

"*He must not think me bold,*" murmurs May.

Their conversation has been carried on after they enter the house, and now they are sitting together before a newly-lit fire, waiting till Saunders shall bring them a cup of tea.

"He will not do that, dearest. No man (unless taken off his guard, as Lewis was in Outram Wood) would ever propose to a woman unless he felt sure of her answer beforehand. You have been too much absorbed in yourself and your illness since you returned home, May, and you have scarcely shaken off the habit of being considered an invalid. But you are quite well again now, my dear."

"Oh, yes, mother! I am quite well again now," replies May, with a slight shiver, which Mrs. Moriaty is not slow to perceive. She throws her arm round her daughter, and drawing her closely to her, kisses her fondly on the brow.

"I have guessed your secret, my darling," she whispers. "We women are very keen-sighted where each other are concerned. But the pain is over now, dear, isn't it?"

"Yes, all over, mother," replies May, with a flushing cheek.

"Then try and forget it altogether. Don't let it spoil your future life. I think you are a little sorry now that you refused Lewis Vangel?"

"I am *very* sorry," says her daughter. "I answered him without consideration. I did not know my own mind. I was hasty and foolish, and utterly blind."

"And now, May——"

The girl turns and hides her face in her mother's bosom.

"*Now*," she repeats. "I love him as I never believed it was in my nature (or the nature of any woman) to love. My feelings surprise myself. It seems to me as if there was only one man for me in all the wide, wide world, and *that* the man I have put out of my reach. Oh, *mother! he is* (as you say) so good, and true, and tender.

He tried so hard to heal my wound without any thought of his own. He has never mentioned the subject of his love again to me, but I have seen his eyes fixed on me once or twice so sorrowfully, that I could have cried to remember how I had wounded him. Do you think he still can love me, still wish to make me his wife? For I am not worthy of him. I am utterly, *utterly* unworthy."

"Oh, my darling girl," exclaims Mrs. Moriaty, beaming with pleasure, "if you really feel like this towards our dear Lewis, everything will come right in time. And it has been the dream of my life, May, to see you two, man and wife. Poor papa and I shall never have to part with you then (as we have so often feared and dreaded), but gain two dear children, instead of one. This is indeed a happy revelation for me. Come, dearest, drink your tea, and let Saunders help you to remove your things. You must positively lie down and try to sleep for a few hours, or all this excitement will upset you. Good-bye for a little while. I have taken to prophesying in my old age, and I prognosticate that we shall be the happiest family in England before very long."

May smiles in return, and suffers herself to be taken upstairs and put to bed again, but it is some time before she can compose herself to sleep.

"He loves me still," she murmurs indistinctly, as she tosses to and fro upon her pillow, "and they wish it to be so, and say it will make them happy. But can *I* ever be happy again?—so unworthy of happiness as I am? So utterly, *utterly*, unworthy."

CHAPTER XVI.

A SACRED COMPACT.

PROMPTED to action on both sides, and urged to take the step they are secretly longing for, is it wonderful that these two young people come to an understanding at last? Lewis Vangel's heart beats very fast that afternoon as he dresses himself to attend the Manor House dinner-table, and it beats still faster as he catches sight of May Moriarty, standing on the door-step in the rays of the setting sun, and apparently waiting for his arrival. She went to sleep after a certain amount of restlessness, and did not rise till late in the day, and now, refreshed and blooming, she looks almost like her old self again. Her white gown of some woollen material falls in straight folds about her girlish figure; her fair hair crowns her head like the aureole of a saint; in her bosom she bears a bunch of white flowers, like tiny lily bells, which she has gathered from the conservatory. You could conceive nothing more sweet and pure than her whole appearance. It dazzles Lewis's eyes and makes his heart ache, but he smiles cheerfully as they meet, and tells her that no one would believe she had been waking half the night.

"Ah, poor Ellen," she replies, with sudden remembrance. "How is Thrupp bearing it, Doctor Vangel? Have you seen him since?"

"Yes, I was there this afternoon. He is very sad, of course, but he is resigned. This blow has been hanging over his head for a long time. I told him six months ago *that his daughter could not live through the winter.*"

"Now, children," cries Mrs. Moriarty, as she joins them

in the hall, "I forbid any more melancholy talk this evening. The poor girl's gone, and we can't bring her back, so please drop the subject, or I shall have my May crying again. And I am sure, Lewis, you don't want to make her do that. Look what a lovely button-hole I have for you. I have just gathered it in the conservatory. Come here and be made smart at once."

Lewis goes up to her obediently, though he has no idea why she should be in such good spirits.

"Why, mother," exclaims May, looking down upon the bouquet at her breast, "you have chosen the very same flowers as I have."

"Well, they're none the worse for that, I suppose," replies Mrs. Moriarty, as she surveys her two young people, similarly adorned, with considerable satisfaction; "you chose the prettiest you could find, May, and Lewis shall never come off second-best at my hands. But come in to dinner, both of you. The second gong has sounded, and papa never likes to be kept waiting."

Mr. Moriarty welcomes Lewis with much cordiality and many reproaches for having stayed away so long, and then the meal proceeds in the most pleasant and sociable manner. As soon as it is concluded, the party adjourn to the drawing-room, which opens into a magnificent conservatory (the pride of Mrs. Moriarty's heart); which is filled with the choicest plants. Huge tropical palms rear their fan-like fronds to the very rafters; the eucalyptus and the magnolia, with the giant cacti of the south, are flourishing side by side, whilst the feathery sprays of the Australian ferns, and the gorgeous creeping vines of India, and the delicately-tinted blossoms of the American shrubs fill the interstices, and transform the glass-house into a veritable fairyland. Lewis loves Mrs. Moriarty's conservatory, and has often spent an hour there by himself, examining the tropical buds and flowers, inhaling the rich, warm odor of the leaf mould, and trying to imagine he is

far away amongst the scenes and places which they recall to him. On the present occasion, as he enters the drawing-room, he stands upon the threshold of the open door that leads into the conservatory, gazing at the wealth of color and beauty within, until May joins him there.

"Are not mother's plants looking well?" she inquires. "I don't think I ever saw them in greater perfection."

"They are superb," he answers; "the most beautiful things, to my mind, in the Manor House, and that is saying a good deal. Where did you pick these blossoms from? touching the flowers in his button-hole. "They are new to me."

"So they are to me, and I don't think mother knows their name. I fancy they must be a new investment of old Cobb, the gardener. He has entirely his own way with the houses, and scolds mamma as if she were a baby if she presumes to pick a flower without his leave. But I never take any notice of the old man's cranks. I found these blossoms on a little shrub at the other end of the conservatory, just behind the big palm. Are they not pretty? Like fairy bells. Would you like to see them growing?"

"Very much."

"Come along, then. Where's mamma?" looking back into the drawing-room. "Disappeared for a talk with Mrs. Handyside, I suppose, and the dear old pater is settling himself for a cosy snooze before he drags you into the billiard-room. They don't want us just now, that's very evident."

She steps, laughingly, yet rather nervously, over the threshold as she speaks, and Lewis follows her. In winter, the conservatory is illuminated at night, but the season is not yet considered sufficiently advanced for that, and a pleasant dusk pervades it instead. The large chandelier in the drawing-room casts flashes of light upon the *white marble* with which it is paved, but May and Lewis

can scarcely distinguish the nature of the plant they stoop to examine.

"It is too late to-night," says the girl regretfully; "you must see it another time. The leaf is very small and pretty, something like the myrtle, and the flowers have a pleasant smell, like bitter almonds."

"They are pretty, but they are poisonous," replies Lewis.

"How can you tell?"

"By the scent, chiefly, and the bruising of the leaves."

"I believe you know everything," says May. "I am glad you told me, though, for I meant to pick some, with other flowers, to strew on poor Ellen to-morrow. But I will not put anything poisonous on her. We have plenty of white blossoms in the other houses. Do you think Mr. Thrupp will mind my taking some to place in her hands and on her bosom, Doctor Vangel?"

"I think he will value your kind thought immensely. You have won a true friend, though a humble one, in him, Miss Moriatty. He could not say enough in your praise, poor fellow, this afternoon. Where the poor *are* grateful, they are very grateful indeed!"

"But it is to *you* he owes his gratitude, Doctor Vangel, not to *me*! I told him so this morning. I should never have thought of visiting poor Ellen unless you had advised me."

"True; but the action was no less your own. Your mother seems afraid that discussing the subject may make you melancholy, but it should not do so. It should bring you happiness and peace of mind. They are the natural rewards of unselfishness."

"Oh, Doctor Vangel, I am not unselfish! You must not praise me. You make me feel so ashamed of myself. I never gave a thought to my fellow-creatures until you taught me to do so; and if any good has come from it, it is *your* good, not mine. And—and—I want so much to thank you for it."

"You owe me no thanks," replies Lewis hurriedly. "I saw you unhappy and trying to kill thought, and I showed you the way to do it. That is all."

"You returned good for evil," says the girl, in a low voice. "I hurt you. Why should you have cared to see me hurt? You ought to have been glad. Most people would have been so."

"Glad to see you unhappy? Oh, no! Don't believe so badly of them as that. You hurt me a little, perhaps, but you had no desire to do so. And when I saw you harassed, and upset, and knew it might be the turning-point of your existence for good or evil, what could I do but point out the possible remedy that lay within your reach? There is no credit due to me, Miss Moriarty. Don't hint at such a thing again. You, and you alone, have worked out your own cure."

"I shall always ascribe it to you," she says.

"You must not stop here," he continues, without noticing her words. "You must go on with your acts of kindness and charity, until you develop into the noble woman which you possess the capability of becoming."

"Oh, no! no!" cries May quickly; "I shall *never* be noble; I shall never be good. You mistake me altogether, Doctor Vangel. You do not know me as I am."

"I think I do," he answers. "You may be weak and faulty—we all are. You may not have been strong in resisting temptation—few of us have been, but your eyes are open. You see where you have been mistaken, and the danger will not return. Am I not right?"

"It will not return whilst you are my friend. Somehow I always feel safe with you."

"I *am* your friend. I have promised to be so."

"And I have been so ungrateful for your kindness. I wounded you so in Outram Wood. No, don't speak. *I know I did.* And I was so silly, too. I didn't think of *what I was saying.* I—I—had never thought of it. And *now——*"

Lewis has grown very pale. He guesses what is coming, and he knows he has no power to resist it. Is he rushing on his happiness or his misery?

"Is it wise," he asks, in a constrained manner, "to speak like this?"

"Yes, yes, let me speak this once, and say that I am sorry, that I regret what I said, that—that—I wish that time could come over again."

Lewis is no longer pale now. The sudden rush of blood to his heart and his brain has tinted his face crimson.

"May, what do you mean?" he exclaims. "Don't torture me over again."

"I mean that I am miserable, that I want to ask you to forgive me for what I said then, and to make you happy if I can," says May, turning towards him.

Lewis throws his arms around her.

"*Happy!*" he echoes. "But there is only one way in which you *can* make me happy, May."

"I know. I mean that way, if you still care to have it so," she whispers. "Oh, Lewis, I was so blind not to see who had gained my real heart. I think it must have been yours long ago, and all the rest has been only self-love and flattery. Take me and make me good. You *only* can do it. I do not feel safe anywhere but with *you*."

Again that avowal of insecurity that makes him shudder. But, as he holds her to his heart, he determines inwardly that she shall be safe whilst under his protection, if he dies to make her so.

"You love me, May?" he whispers back again. "You are *sure* of it? This is not a sudden fancy on your part?"

"Oh, Lewis," clinging to him, "I *do* love you! You have raised me from death to life. I do not seem to have *lived before I knew you*."

"Then be mine," he answers, "mine *only*, May, mine forever. I have been longing to say this to you for weeks past, but I dared not. Both your mother and father have urged me to say it, but I have waited for your heart to speak first. And now that it has spoken, I—I *cannot* resist it," he says, with a force that would have told one less inexperienced than Mary Moriarty that he *has* tried to resist it, and determined to resist it, and is conscious of his own weakness in yielding. But this is a moment to think of nothing but the prospect before him, and he delivers himself up to it. He is young, and he is passionate, and the girl he loves is folded in his arms, and lies there a willing prisoner, with her soft cheek pressed to his, and her pure breath, (fragrant as a spring breeze passing over a field of cowslips) fanning his face. Lewis becomes intoxicated with the intensity of the feeling to which, for the first time, he has given the rein, and hardly knows, as he stands there, whether he is on earth or in heaven, until he is recalled to this world by the voice of Mrs. Moriarty, who comes suddenly upon them round a bush of oleanders.

"May! Lewis! where are you hiding yourselves? Papa wants you!" she exclaims. The lovers start asunder guiltily, like broken bows, but not before she has seen the state of affairs. "Why, what is this?" she continues with a laugh, knowing very well all the time.

"Mrs. Moriarty," replies Lewis seriously, "May has just made me very happy by promising to become my wife. You know that I would not have spoken to her on the subject unless I had first received your sanction and that of her father, and so I hope we have only to ask to receive it over again."

Mrs. Moriarty rushes up to him, and, seizing him round the neck, gives him a hearty kiss upon either cheek.

"My dear boy!" she exclaims, "I am delighted. You *know it is just what* I have been longing for. And Mr.

Moriaty will say just the same. We would rather have you for a son than any one we know."

She gives him another kiss and a squeeze, and May pulls her timidly by the sleeve.

"Mother, dear, aren't you glad for *me* too?"

"Oh, my darling child, of course I am. I shall never be able to wish Lewis joy now without wishing it for you also."

"Why do you give him all the kisses, then?"

"Oh, you great baby! Come here and let me hug you both together. But I have kissed you all your life, you see, and I have never been able to kiss Lewis until now. I have often longed to do it, though. But you must come to papa straight off, for he'll be as pleased to hear the news as I am."

She drags the blushing culprits into the drawing-room, where the same ordeal (a terrible one to them both) has to be gone through. However, all ends happily. Mr. Moriatty pinches his daughter's cheek, and calls her a sly hussy, and invites Lewis to a domestic conference the following morning, at which time the wedding-day is to be fixed, and other important preliminaries discussed and determined on. The remainder of the evening is passed in a great deal of "chaffing" and joking, good-naturedly intended, but very dissonant to Lewis's state of mind. but he takes it as it is meant, though he is thankful when eleven o'clock strikes, and he has a good excuse to get away and commune with himself. Mr. Moriatty wrings his hand warmly,—Mrs. Moriatty gives him another sounding kiss, and May follows him out into the hall. When he finds himself once more alone with her, Vangel's unnatural restraint gives way, and he embraces the girl with a passionate eagerness for which she is unprepared.

"Oh, my darling," he whispers fervently, "my own darling! How I have hoped and longed for this day! You are mine now, May! *Mine*, every bit of you, and no

other man must ever claim the least particle even of your thoughts. You have given yourself to me entirely, have you not? You have not kept back anything?"

She clings to him closely.

"Oh, Lewis! Lewis! I *love you*," she replies.

Hers is a passionate nature—more so than that of most women—and his ardor awakens a corresponding warmth in her, and in the pleasure of receiving the assurance of her love he passes over the fact that she has not answered his question.

"Let me walk down the drive with you," she says pleadingly.

"Not without something over your head and shoulders, love. I must not risk the health of my new possession."

She catches up a woollen wrap from the hat-stand, and twists it over her head and round her throat.

"This will do. It is not really cold to-night. And I want to speak to you, Lewis."

Is it his fancy that the hand he draws through his arm and covers with his own is trembling, and is it the moonlight only that makes Mary Moriarty's fair face look so pale?

"Well, darling," he says, as they commence the little journey together, "and what is the mighty communication you wish to make to me?"

"Lewis! I remember once, when I was a little girl, I got into sad disgrace because I told the truth about something, and you said you admired me for being so brave, and that you would rather be punished for telling the truth than rewarded for a lie."

"Did I, sweetheart? I don't recall the circumstance, but I'll take your word for it, for what I have most admired in your character, May, has been your truth and candor. The most beautiful woman in the world would *look hideous* to me if I knew her to be a liar."

"No! no! don't say that," exclaims May, with a tight-

ened pressure on his arm ; " but I will never tell you a lie, Lewis."

" I am sure you won't, my darling ? What put such an idea into your head ? "

" Because I want to tell you something before we are married—before our engagement goes any further. Lewis, you know how ill I was when I returned from Paris ? "

" I do. But, May, I don't want to force your confidence. You have done me the highest honor to-night that a woman can confer on a man. You have promised to be solely and wholly mine. In return, I pay you the compliment of believing in your entire faith and probity. I know that, when you are my wife, you will neither betray nor deceive me. That is enough, dear. Let our life of mutual trust and confidence begin from to-day."

" But I cannot feel happy until you know—something," persists the girl. " You might hear a hint of it afterwards, and think I had wilfully concealed it from you. Lewis, let me speak ! "

" Certainly, if you wish it. But it is not at *my* request, remember."

" When I went to visit my Aunt Kathleen," commences May, in a low voice, " I was thrown a great deal with my cousin, Denis O'More. He is a bad man, Lewis—bad, and dissipated, and deceitful. I know that now, and I hate and despise him. But I did not discover it at first. My aunt threw us a great deal together, and was always sounding his praises to me, and saying how much she wished we cared for one another, and—and—he is very good-looking, you know."

" And so my poor girl fell in love with him ? I guessed all that a long time ago, May."

" Did you really ? But, Lewis, he always talked as if we were going to be married, and I quite believed it, and I was very, *very* foolish. Oh, I can't think now how I *ever could* have been so weak—but he flattered me and

gave me presents, and took me everywhere, and he was a married man all the time. And now, will you ever think of me the same again?" says May, with a burst of tears.

"I think all the more of you, May, for having tried to be honest with me, but let your revelations end here. As I have told you, they are no news to me. You have been unfortunately thrown in the way of a thoroughly bad man, and for a while you have been his victim. Mr. O'More must be an unmitigated scoundrel, but he shall not darken your life again if I can help it. And don't let the remembrance of him cast a cloud over ours. You have passed through a bitter experience, but it will do you no good to recall it. Bury it, May, as I shall," replies Lewis, and then, after a pause, he adds, with an effort, "as I *have*," and heaves a sigh and says no more.

"I never *really* loved him, Lewis," whispers May timidly, as the moonlight reveals his sad, stern face, "and all the time I was away from home, the expression of your eyes, as they looked in Outram Wood, haunted me and made me feel unhappy and self-reproachful. I think I must have loved you through it all, dear."

"Mary!" says Lewis, stopping short, and looking in her eyes (and it is so seldom that she is called 'Mary' that it makes his words sound more solemn,) "we have pledged our mutual word to-night to be faithful, and loving, and true to each other, to our lives' end. I mean what I have said so thoroughly that I shall not be able to plight you a more serious troth at the altar. Henceforward, therefore, we belong to each other only. All the petty loves that may have interfered with my former life I cast behind my back forever. I shall not even mention them, and I wish it to be the same with yours. You have thought it right to tell me of this, and I admire *you for the effort*. But there let it rest. Like Ellen Thrupp's spirit, which has risen to-day above the things

of earth, let us try to rise above these material, unholy loves, and cling together in a spiritual union that shall know no end."

"Oh, Lewis, darling, you are too good for me," she murmurs.

"No, love ! I am not good at all," he answers, " but I have seen more of the trouble of this world, perhaps, than other men, and know how hardly poor human nature is judged for following its own instincts. I love you, May, devotedly, but I never believed you to be an angel any more than myself. We are fellow-sinners as well as fellow-mortals, darling. But our love (if it is true) will have the power to raise us above mortality. Good-night, my sweet wife that is to be. May God so deal with me as I deal with you !"

It is a very unusual farewell for a lover to make to his *fiancée* on the first night of their betrothal, but Lewis Vangel is unlike any other man ; the kiss that accompanies his words is fond and sweet, but it is the kiss of a brother rather than that of a husband.

May's allusion to her disappointment seems to have quenched his passion for a while, like cold water thrown upon a flame, and, even as he strides homeward, he does not feel very jubilant or victorious. He does not regret what has happened ; on the contrary, he is glad and thankful that the matter is settled, and he has gained the privilege of watching over the interests of Mary Moriarty to her life's end. But the passion which is evoked in her presence, and at the sight of her fair, sweet face, dies down into calmness when he leaves her, and he feels very serious for a young lover, and contemplates the prospects before him rather practically. He believes that May loves him ; he has believed it for some time past, but the knowledge has lost the power to madden him with joy as it might once have done. He is considering, rather, as he walks home,

how he shall break the news to his mother, and what she will say to it. Mrs. Vangel is not likely to take it very quietly. She has chosen to look upon her son as so entirely her own property, that the idea of having to give him up to a young wife will not be pleasant to her. And then, again, the money part of the business grinds into Lewis's soul. Mr. Moriarty has alluded that evening to the purchase of Wotton House and the amount of his daughter's dowry, and these good things which would fill any ordinary suitor's heart with delight, are all disadvantages in the eyes of Lewis Vangel.

How shall he live (he thinks) in another man's house and on another man's money? Not that he has any intention of giving up his appointment as parish doctor of Withyslea; on the contrary, he shall work harder than ever, to try and augment his stipend by private practice, but he would far rather that May had been the daughter of some poor man, that she might have brought him herself only, and let him work for her as laborers do for their wives. But it was one of the drawbacks to the fruition of his love, that he could not take her by herself; her parents would not consent to her sharing so lowly a position.

As he lies down into his bed that night, his last thoughts are,—“Love owes a duty to itself as well as to the creature that is loved. If she loves me, if I can make her happy, then my love is bound to give her happiness, without any reference to my own feelings or disappointment. If she is not quite all I once believed her to be, she is still the lady of my love; and so may God bless us both, and make us true and faithful.”

CHAPTER XVII.

NEWS FOR WITHYSLEA.

THESE are Lewis Vangel's inmost thoughts, but it must not be supposed that he expresses them openly, or even allows them to be guessed at by anybody but himself. He does not sleep much that night, but when he rises in the morning he has made up his mind, and he will not swerve from it. Fate seems to have worked for him against his will, and insists on his accepting that which, even whilst he hungered for, he had determined not to take. Mary Moriarty is to be his wife. Well, then, he will extract all the joy possible from his union with her, perform the duties of it to the best of his ability, and cast all sad thoughts behind his back forever. From that moment they shall be as though they had never been. He will not only prevent their rising to disturb May's peace of mind; he will forbid their poisoning his own. Having settled this matter with himself, Lewis begins the day happy and hopeful, and with only one doubt, whether he shall say anything to his mother about the contemplated change before he has kept his appointment with Mr. Moriarty. Finally he decides not to do so. He feels intuitively that the only bright spot in the horizon to Mrs. Vangel will be the increase of wealth and comfort, and, therefore, he had better be prepared to state with certainty the amount of it before he deals the inevitable blow. The old lady cannot understand why he is unusually merry over the breakfast-table, and is surprised when she hears he is about to pay another visit to the Manor House.

"Well, Lewis," she says rather peevishly, "you are, without exception, the most extraordinary boy I ever met. Your father was changeable enough, but he couldn't hold

a candle to you ; nothing would make you go near the Moriats a week ago. There was that lovely haunch of venison which I couldn't persuade you even to taste, and now you visit them two days running ; is anything the matter there ? More mysteries ? Any one requiring your services ? ”

“ Yes, they *all* want me,” replies Lewis, delighted to mystify her, “ the whole family ; never saw such a case before.”

“ Good gracious, is it anything infectious ? When did it break out, my dear ? ”

“ Only yesterday. A sort of mania ; father and mother and daughter all got it badly, but I will tell you more on my return, mother.”

“ If it is so serious as that, I don't think you should laugh over it, Lewis ; but you medical men get hardened to sickness. I am sorry for the poor Moriats ; they have been very unfortunate of late, out of one trouble into another.”

“ And this is the worst they've encountered yet, mother, and it's likely to prove a lasting one into the bargain,” cries Lewis, laughing again at her solemn looks ; “ but I must be off, for they will be expecting me,” and with an affectionate kiss he leaves her.

“ God bless the dear boy,” thinks Mrs. Vangel, as she locks away the tea and sugar, “ he is wonderfully cheerful, considering the work he has to go through, and he's only had an egg for breakfast, too ; I wouldn't mind his working if I could feed him better, but I'm sure he's got thinner lately, and his eyes look the biggest part of him. Well, I hope Mr. Moriats will give him an extra fee for his attendance, for I am sure we need it.”

And the poor old lady trots into the kitchen to consult with her handmaiden how they can best manage to make *the remains of yesterday's dinner* do for the feast of *to-day*.

Meanwhile, Lewis is going as fast as his legs can carry him to the Manor House, and there, at the very gate, stands May, looking out anxiously for him.

"Oh, Lewis!" she exclaims, with all her old freedom of speech and manner, as he comes up with her; "Oh, Lewis, I am *so* happy."

She links her arm within his, and raises her gray-blue eyes to his face with the confidence of a child that does not know the nature of a rebuff.

"And I too am happy, my dearest," he replies, "happier than I ever thought it possible that I could be. The decision we arrived at last night was so sudden and so bewildering, I hardly realized its great significance, and since I have had time to think it over, I can scarcely believe in my good fortune. May, have you yet decided when it is to be?"

"I think papa and mamma have been talking it over," she answers, with a blush; "and do you know that they are going to buy Wotton House for us, and have it all done up and decorated from top to bottom? It will be handsomer than the Manor House, Lewis, though the garden is not so large."

"A four-roomed cottage would be handsomer than the Manor House when my love is in it, May. How they will miss you here?"

"Yes, I am afraid they will. Mother wanted to arrange for us all to live together, but father said it is better for married people to be alone. So it is to be Wotton House, after all."

"Your father is right," replies Lewis, as they reach the hall door, and pass into the library, where Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty are sitting over a cozy fire.

Here follows a renewal of congratulations and protestations of affection, and then the young doctor's future father-in-law goes at once into business. His proposal is a renewal of what he told Lewis Vangel some time ago.

when he sanctioned his addresses to his daughter. He intends to buy Wotton House, which is in the market, and have it thoroughly set in order, and settle it, with twenty thousand pounds, on his daughter and her husband mutually, that is to say, the house and property are to pass, on the death of either, to the survivor. But Lewis will not hear of such a settlement.

"You do more than enough for me, sir," he says, "in giving me your daughter and the wherewithal to keep her. For the love I bear her, and the sake of calling her my wife, I am willing to live in her house, and share in her good things, but it must stop there. Please let both personal and private property be settled exclusively on May and her children, without any mention of myself. I shall go on as I have done, with the exception of working harder to increase my practice. Of course I shall still be bound to support my mother. I owe her much, and, even for May's sake, I could not desert her. This had better be understood amongst us plainly. She will continue to occupy the cottage, which is part of my appointment, and I must allow her as much as is necessary for her to live upon. And I shall go in at once for renewed study, so as to pass for my M. D. as soon as possible."

But all this while May is plucking at Lewis's sleeve, in her impatience to interrupt him.

"Lewis! what are you talking about?" she exclaims at last. "Of course Mrs. Vangel will live with us at Wotton House. There will be oceans of room there for her, and your sister Anna too, when she can come. Do you think I would take you away from your mother, and when she has only you? Why, she would hate me for it."

Lewis gazes in the sweet, speaking countenance upraised to his, and cannot resist kissing it, even before her *parents*.

"*My darling*," he says, "you are an angel, but it will

be better not. Mothers and daughters-in-law do not always get on well with one another, and I would not have you vexed in your own house for all the world."

May pouts visibly.

"It is not *my* house, it is *our* house and I won't go into it at all unless I am to have my way. Mother, dear, am I not right?"

"Yes, my dear, you are; and, look here, Lewis Vangel, I won't have any heterodox notions introduced to the family. A man's mother should be his wife's mother, and always would be if she acted a daughter's part towards her. I never fell out with my old man's mother, bless her old heart, did I, Dan? And she lived with us many years after our marriage."

"No, you never quarrelled, pussy, but you're a woman in a thousand, and so was my mother. However, I mean to settled this matter my own way. Wotton House shall be Lewis's, and the money shall be tied down for Mary and her children. Will that satisfy everybody? I told you, Lewis, that, whether you married my girl or not, I should look after your future interests, because I regard you as a friend. Well, it takes the shape of Wotton House. That shall be my wedding-gift to you. Then, if you offer Mrs. Vangel a home there, it will be to *your* house she will come, not her daughter-in-law's, and she will be under an obligation to no one but yourself."

"Oh, that settles it all beautifully, you dear old pater," cries May, embracing her father; "only I wish the money was Lewis's too, then I should only have to curtsy for everything he gave me, and say, 'thank you, sir.'"

"You are all a thousand times too good to me. I can't think what I've done to deserve such trust and confidence on your part," says Lewis, in a bewildered manner; "but if loving and protecting Mary to the extent of my life will pay off some of the debt I owe you, Mr. Moriarty, it shall be paid."

"We know that, my dear fellow, and don't make more of the obligation than it is worth. I am bound, under any circumstances, to provide for my child, and pussy and I will not have to give up a single comfort in order to do so. I was offered the purchase of Wotton House as a matter of investment some time back, but refused it, as my wife and I have always felt that where Mary went we must follow. Now, however, I shall close with the offer at once, and get the workmen in as soon as possible, and have it ready for you against you need it. It will be nice work to keep pussy employed whilst you're away. And now comes the last item, but which you doubtless think the most important one. When is this wedding to take place?"

Lewis looks at May, and colors with expectation, and May turns from him and hides her face in her mother's bosom.

"Now, don't be a goose," says her father dryly. "If you don't want to be married to him, why have you taken up my time talking about settlements and houses? I believe it is considered the lady's privilege to decide this part of the business, else, I daresay, Lewis and I could fix a convenient date straight off."

"Oh, hush, papa! don't be too hard on her. She's only thinking," expostulates the tender mother, as she kisses the crown of her daughter's bright head. "When would you like it to be, my bird," she whispers; "in a month or six weeks?"

"At any time, mother," says May, "that will be convenient to us all."

"This is the fourteenth of October, Dan, isn't it?" continued Mrs. Moriarty to her husband. "Suppose we say the first of December. That will enable them to come back and spend their Christmas with us."

"*It will suit me admirably if the principal parties are agreeable,*" he replies.

"But what about my work?" says Lewis.

"You must get a deputy for the time you're away. But don't worry about that, my boy. You find the man—doctors are not much in my line—and I'll settle the matter with him. You will be my son by that time, and I shall have a right to do so."

"I can never thank you," repeats Lewis, in a faltering voice; "never, so long as I live."

"Well, we've settled it all satisfactorily, and so we need not talk about it any more to-day," exclaims Mrs. Moriarty cheerfully. "And now, May, am I not a true prophet? Didn't I tell you that, before long, we should be the happiest family in England? Lewis, you will still stay and lunch with us, of course?"

"I wish I could, Mrs. Moriarty, but I must not let my happiness interfere with my duty, and I have a dozen places to visit this morning. I see my man and the cab waiting for me now."

"You will come to dinner, then?"

"Yes, to dinner, for this night only," replies Lewis laughing, "and after that I must spend all my evenings in study. I shall not be satisfied now till I write M. D. after my name."

"Cannot you come for one little walk with me this afternoon?" pleads May.

"I am afraid not, sweetheart, though it's very hard to refuse you. Have you any particular end in view?"

"I expect her 'particular end' is to make love to you," said Mr. Moriarty, laughing.

"No such thing, papa. I think that's awfully rude of you. But I should have liked to have gone over Wotton House with Lewis."

"And have Miss Prew and the other gossips of Withyslea speculating on your improper behavior before they know the reason of it? No, my dear child, let mamma disseminate this grand piece of news first, and then they will

expect to see you and Vangel arm-in-arm for the future."

"And I have to announce it to my mother, who would be terribly hurt if she heard it first from anybody but myself," says Lewis. "And so, good-bye for the present to all of you."

He shakes hands with Mr. and Mrs. Moriaty, presses one kiss on May's blooming cheek, and the next moment he is riding down the drive at a smart pace, and waving his hand joyfully before he turns the corner.

"My dear May, you have gained a treasure," exclaim both her parents, as he disappears, and the girl coincides, almost tearfully, in their opinion. Never surely did the course of love run more smoothly, nor the courtship of an impecunious young man end so agreeably and triumphantly for all concerned. Lewis thinks a great deal before he returns home over the best means of telling his mother of his approaching marriage, and decides that Wotton House will pave the way to it better than anything else. But it is sufficiently startling for the old lady to hear him say, as he sits down to have his usual smoke before setting out on his afternoon rounds,—

"Mother, I have a big surprise for you. I have had a most valuable present made me to-day."

"A present, Lewis! From the Moriatys, of course. It is very kind of them. But what is it? A ring, or a breast-pin? It is very nice to receive tokens of that sort, of course, but I would rather they gave you a five-pound note. It would come in so handy for Christmas."

"But this is better than a five-pound note. It is a provision for life for me. Mr. Moriaty is going to buy *Wotton House*! and settle it upon me."

"Wotton House!" repeats Mrs. Vangel, with open eyes. "But what will you do with Wotton House? We have no lunatics."

"We will live in it."

"Live in an empty house, child. Where's the money to come from to furnish it?"

"Mr. Moriatty is going to put it in complete order, and furnish it into the bargain. What do you think of that?"

"Lewis, you astonish me. I cannot believe what you say. But, if you are not joking, how can you keep up such a house on a hundred and twenty pounds a year? It will require several servants. You will be lost in it."

"I hope not. But, in order to avoid such a calamity, Mr. Moriatty will give me an income of about a thousand a year, and some one to look after me into the bargain."

"Oh, Lewis, you must be making fun of me. I don't like it, my dear. It is not respectful of you."

"Mother, can't you understand? It is all true as gospel, only Mr. Moriatty is doing it for his daughter's sake instead of mine. I am going to marry Mary Moriatty."

He could not have taken her more completely by surprise had he announced his marriage with a princess of the blood royal.

"You—are—going—to—marry—*Mary Moriatty*?" she repeats, in a tone of the utmost astonishment.

"I am indeed, and I am almost as unable to believe it as you appear to me to be. But the Moriattys have accepted me as a son-in-law, and May has accepted me as a husband, and we are to be married at the first of December. But I feel uncommonly as if I were in a dream."

"And you are to have Wotton House and a thousand a year, Lewis?"

"Mr. Moriatty is going to purchase Wotton House as a wedding-present for me, and to settle twenty thousand pounds upon his daughter. And May is so sweet about it, mother. She insists that you are to live with us—that is, if it pleases you to do so. And I feel sure she will be as good and dutiful to you as she is to her own mother."

"Why, Lewis, this will be a grand match indeed!" exclaims the old lady, smiling.

How seldom things turn out in this world as we expect them to do. Lewis Vangel believed that his mother would

be dissolved in tears at the idea of sharing his attention with any other woman, instead of which, here she is, apparently delighted at the prospect of his future magnificence. The other side of the question does not seem to trouble her at all. Her curiosity is the first feeling which he arouses, and next, her gratification. It is less flattering, perhaps, than what he anticipated, but it is also less inconvenient, and when his surprise has evaporated, he is glad of the spirit in which she has taken his news.

"A very grand match," she continues ; "the best you could make. You will be amongst the most important persons in Withyslea. I am deeply gratified ! And to be the owner of Wotton House, too ! Really, Lewis, you could not have done better for yourself."

"I am glad you see it in that light, mother," replies the young man, though he hardly *looks* glad ; "I was afraid you might be a little disappointed about the affair."

"Disappointed, my dear, to hear you are going to marry a girl with twenty thousand pounds, and all her father's money, I suppose, when he dies ? Why, Miss Moriarty is quite an heiress ! Nobody thought she would have returned from her visit to London free."

"Yes ! Her money and her prospects were the great drawback in my eyes," says Lewis rather gloomily, "and I should never have had the assurance to come to an understanding with her if her parents had not almost made the match between us. I hate the idea of being thought a fortune-hunter."

"Oh, no one would think you *that*, Lewis, I am sure, and the Moriats show their wisdom in having selected you for a son-in-law. Where could they have found a more suitable husband for their daughter ?"

"Oh, mother, mother ! don't talk such nonsense," cries Lewis, laughing. "An out-at-elbows pauper like myself.

Where could they have found one *less* suitable? I have nothing to offer in exchange for their liberality. I can only stand still and accept their kindness. It hurts my pride considerably, I can tell you, and, did I not love May from the bottom of my soul, I could not do it."

"But, my dear boy, that is folly! Poor men marry rich women every day, and raise themselves by means of their wives. Why shouldn't you do the same? And your birth is higher than your position, Lewis. You were born a gentleman, and Mr. Moriarty a working man. Doubtless he has taken that fact into consideration."

"Perhaps, mother; still, I cannot forget that I shall owe a great deal too much to him. But he will not let me feel it. They treat me already as if I were their son."

"And so they should," exclaims Mrs. Vangel, with a glance of pride at him. "They would be glad enough to have such a son, I'll be bound. Oh, Lewis, my dear, I feel very happy, though your news has quite upset me. How long has all this been going on?"

"Do you mean my love for May? A long time, I think—longer than I have any idea of myself. But we only arrived at a mutual understanding yesterday. And Mr. Moriarty made me aware of his generous intentions regarding us this morning."

"Dear me, it is all very gratifying," exclaims Mrs. Vangel; "and I must go up to the Manor House as soon as possible and tell dear Mrs. Moriarty so. The idea of your owning Wotton House. I can scarcely believe it. What a pride I shall take in managing it for you, Lewis. You will have to keep three or four servants, as many as they do at the Vicarage. It will be a lovely place when it is newly decorated."

"Yes, mother, but you mustn't forget that May will be mistress there. You have been my housekeeper for so long, I am half afraid of our all setting up house together."

but May is anxious that you should share our good things, and I know it will be more comfortable for you than remaining here by yourself."

"Oh, yes, dear Lewis! I shall be terribly disappointed if you leave me behind. Besides, I should never dream of interfering, except to save your wife trouble. And I don't think I shall ever wish to leave those lovely grounds. How astonished everybody will be. I wonder what Mrs. Crosbie will say?"

"Something ill-natured, no doubt; but it is nothing to us what she may or may not think on the subject."

"But she is the most important lady in the village, Lewis!"

"The greatest scandalmonger, you mean."

"Dear, dear! I hope not! Scandal is such a terrible thing. But, as the Vicar's wife, she ought to be told first. I think I will put on my bonnet and pay her a visit."

"You could not adopt a better method of sowing the news broadcast! However, mother dear, I've no objection, as the sooner it is known the better. When I have a moment to spare, I must write to dear Anna. She will sympathize in true sisterly fashion with my happiness, for she found out my secret when she was last, here and prophesied that everything would come right in time. How nice it would be to have her down for a whole month's holiday. We must try and manage it, for May is as anxious to see her again as I am."

He rises as he speaks, and knocks out the ashes of his pipe into the fire-place.

"Mother," he says, "if this change is to make you happier and more comfortable, it will be twice as acceptable to me. I cannot tell you what a relief your way of taking the news has been. I was half afraid you might *be vexed, and fearful* of the future. But it is all right *now*. I shall look forward to seeing your old age one of

ease and content, and to knowing that my good fortune has increased yours. Say God bless me, mother, before I go."

Mrs. Vangel seems to realize, then, that she has left something out of her congratulations, and her kiss and her benediction are both very hearty ones. But she has got Wotton House upon the brain, and, as soon as her son has left her, she puts on her walking apparel and trots off, bustling with importance, to the Vicarage.

Mrs. Crosbie is at home. She is seated in her drawing-room with Miss Cassie Prew, engaged in needlework, whilst her children play on the carpet beside her. She is not over-fond of Mrs. Vangel (who is rather apt to say what she means), but she receives her with assumed cordiality, and regrets that the Vicar is absent.

"I didn't come to see the Vicar. My visit this afternoon is to *you*, Mrs. Crosbie," replied the old lady. "I am the bearer of a very important piece of news, which I consider that you are entitled to hear before anybody else."

"Indeed. Nothing wrong in the parish, I hope? No trouble with those miserable dissenters, whom, I regret to see, Doctor Vangel rather encourages in their apostacy than otherwise."

"I know nothing about the dissenters, nor any of the other parishioners. I have no time for gossiping. I have had enough to do hitherto with managing my son's small establishment—and I am likely to have a great deal more."

"How is that?"

"Lewis is going to be married."

"*Married!*"

Both the ladies start simultaneously, but for different reasons. Mrs. Crosbie remembers the interview she held with Lewis two days before, and wonders if he has repeated the substance of it to his mother, and Cassie Prew

hears in the announcement the death-knell of her own hopes concerning the young doctor of Withyslea. The Vicar's wife is the first to recover herself.

"Your news is indeed startling, Mrs Vangel. Doctor Vangel is certainly of a marriageable age, but his circumstances have been thought to preclude such a notion on his part—at all events for the present."

"So they would in an ordinary case, Mrs. Crosbie. But my son is about to marry an heiress."

You surprise me. Who is the lady?"

"Miss Mary Moriarty, of the Manor House. And her father settles twenty thousand pounds on her on her wedding-day, with Wotton House, newly decorated and furnished from attic to basement."

And Mrs. Vangel folds her hands complacently in her lap, and looks from one of the ladies to the other, as much as to say, "What do you think of that?"

What Miss Prew thinks of it is evidenced by her giving a prolonged howl, and going off into a fit of hysterics.

"Wotton House!" she exclaims; "the scene of my childhood—the spot where my sainted father drew his last breath—the house of which I nightly dream. Wotton House in the hands of strangers. Oh! it is too much."

"Poor dear, she will feel it acutely. And just opposite to her own cottage. It will be an hourly sting. I am truly sorry for her," exclaims Mrs. Crosbie sympathetically.

"But she can't buy the place. What difference will it make to her?" says Mrs. Vangel. "Surely, if she cherishes a regard for it, she would rather see it well kept and cared for than going to rack and ruin, as it soon must do if left in its present condition. That's false sentiment, or selfishness. Why, the grass is growing in the courtyard, and there isn't a flower in the garden. But that will soon be altered. Lewis says Mr. Moriarty is going to have the house improved, both inside and out, until it will be better

than his own. But he dotes on his daughter, and will do anything for her sake. He is quite determined she shall have the best establishment in Withyslea."

"Doctor Vangel is a very fortunate young man," says Mrs. Crosbie, in a cold voice.

"Indeed he is, though it's not a bit more than he deserves," cries the jubilant mother; "and such a lovely girl, too. Her aunt Lady O'More says there was no one to come up to her in London this season. And she adores my Lewis just as a wife should do. They are to be married on the first of December, and all her *trousseau*, as well as the furniture for Wotton House, is to come from town."

Mrs. Crosbie sniffs in her peculiar way.

"I should have thought Mr. Moriarty would have seen the wisdom of employing some of the Leaton tradesmen," is her next remark. "People who intend to reside in a county are usually politic enough to make themselves popular with the laboring classes. They may find the opposite course an inconvenient one in time of need."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Crosbie, where there is money there is no such thing as inconvenience!" exclaims Mrs. Vangel, who has mounted her high horse, and refuses to get down again. "Do you suppose Mr. Moriarty couldn't send to London for what he required at any time if the Leaton people chose to make themselves unpleasant? But they know too well which side their bread is buttered for that. Mrs. Lewis Vangel will be a power in the county, mark my words."

"It is a great change for your son, certainly."

"In a way, yes, but no more than he had a right to expect. Lewis is well-born and good-looking. I have been afraid all along that he would find no one in this pokey little village to suit his fastidious taste. How do you feel now, Miss Prew? It's rather ridiculous of you giving way because Wotton House is sold. You could

not expect it to be kept shut up forever, just because you lived in it as a child. You'll have a better chance than before of seeing the old rooms again."

"Oh, never, Mrs. Vangel! I could not enter them. It would be too painful to me, and especially when Miss Moriatty is mistress there."

"What I hope is, that she will not disappoint you all," says Mrs. Crosbie, "for she is a very thoughtless and giddy young woman. By the way, this engagement must have been a very sudden affair, for your son utterly denied to me that anything of the sort existed between him and Miss Moriatty on Tuesday last."

"It was only settled yesterday; but I don't suppose that Lewis would care to take *every one* into his confidence, Mrs. Crosbie, though he knew it was impending long ago. But I was determined you should hear it first of all. The wedding will be quite an event for Withyslea. The church must be decorated with white flowers, but the Manor House gardeners will doubtless arrange all that, and I do not suppose Mr. Moriatty will allow any but white or gray horses in the carriages. Perhaps my son and his bride will drive to the Leaton station in their own. Doubtless Mr. Moriatty will give his daughter a carriage and horses on her marriage. And they are good enough to insist upon my living with them at Wotton House. I confess I am looking forward to getting out of the cottage, for I feel sometimes as if I could scarcely breathe in such small rooms. But I am afraid I must go now. I want to see dear Mrs. Moriatty, if possible, this afternoon. Good-bye, Mrs. Crosbie; you must tell the Vicar my news. Good-bye, Miss Prew. Don't give way to mock sentiment any more; it is unbecoming your age. Good-bye."

And the old lady, strutting like a peacock under the sense of her coming dignity, leaves her two auditors to *comment freely* on the astounding intelligence they have *received*,

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHANGE OF OPINION.

"WELL, what do you think of it?" says Mrs. Crosbie to Miss Prew, as the door closes behind her visitor. Miss Prew's countenance has not yet regained its normal expression. A tear is trembling on the end of her sharp nose, and her brown curls hang limply. She gulps down a sob as she replies,—

"Think of it, my dear friend? Why, that Doctor Vangel is a most deceitful and designing young man, who has sold himself for money. What else could I think? This is the meaning of all his visits to the Manor House, and his mystery concerning Mary Moriarty's illness. He has basely traded on the opportunities afforded by his profession to ingratiate himself with the young lady, who can twist the old people round her finger as she chooses. It's a made-up affair between them, a disgrace to Withyslea."

"I am quite of your opinion, dear. I've seen what was going on for a long time past. I told you the young man was in love with her, but I never supposed it would end in marriage. I thought the Moriats had more sense. But they may have their own reasons. Who can tell. No one knows where the shoe pinches but he who wears it."

"Fancy his having Wotton House, though, and all that money with it. There'll be no enduring him. Mrs. Vangel is so puffed up already, she is quite a different creature. Did you hear her say that Mrs. Lewis Vangel would be a power in the county?"

"A parish doctor's wife and a brewer's daughter. It is *too* absurd," replies Mrs. Crosbie. "And I suppose they *will* expect us all to kow-too before them. Well, I shall

not do so for one, and I fancy they will look rather small when they find that their Vicar's wife is not present at any of their parties."

But Mrs. Crosbie knows (even as she says the words) that, where the god Plutus holds his court, her presence or absence will make but little difference to the festivities.

"Mary Moriatty," she continues, "has always been a most unpleasant, overbearing, forward young woman. I have seen her laugh openly when I was expressing an opinion, and heard her flatly contradict me if she differed from it. At the same time, she has been on the most friendly terms with the Vicar, even familiar, I may say. I have remonstrated with him on the subject, but he does not see it in the same light as I do. In fact, I think he rather likes her. This alone would prevent my ever becoming intimate at Wotton House. A married woman is always more dangerous than an unmarried girl. She is so much oftener left to her own devices."

"And what does Mr. Somerset think of Miss Moriatty?" inquires Miss Prew.

"Mr. Somerset!" ejaculates the Vicar's wife, tossing her head. "Oh, he dislikes her exceedingly. He doesn't even think her good-looking, and he says her figure is far too thick for grace. Do you know that she told me one day that her waist is twenty-four inches round, and mine is only twenty. Fancy, dear!"

"But she doesn't wear any corsets, I believe."

"No, and never has, from a child. And she had the boldness once to tell the Vicar so, and when he would not believe it, she encouraged him to put his arm round her waist to prove the truth of the assertion. That is four years ago, and I never liked her since."

"She was only fourteen then," says Cassie.

"True, my dear, but if these things are done in the *green tree*, what shall be done in the dry? And then if *she were only* going to marry some one respectable. But

that odious young man Lewis Vangel. I do so thoroughly object to him. I was on the point of seeing what I could do to get him superseded in the village, but now I am afraid it will be impossible. He will have no object in taking a more lucrative appointment."

"Well, I suppose it *was* to be, and it is of no use lamenting over it," sighs Miss Prew. "But all I can say is, that it is much more than he deserves."

"Who has got more than his deserts?" asks the Reverend Andrew Crosbie, in a rich, round voice, as he enters the room. The fresh October air has tinted his broad face, with its double chin, of a fine roseate hue, and his rotund figure, tightly buttoned into his cassock, marks him as rather belonging to the fleshy than the ascetic school. Indeed, some of his parishioners are sacrilegious enough to question if the Reverend Andrew ever *does* fast, unless it be upon salmon and chablis.

"Who is undergoing the torture at your fair hands now?" he continues, as he catches up one of his little children, and dances it aloft. He is rather given to flattering the weaker sex, and cannot rid himself of the custom, even on his own hearthstone.

"We were speaking of young Doctor Vangel, dear," replies Mrs. Crosbie, in a meek voice. "We have just heard of the most marvellous piece of news concerning him. He is engaged to marry Miss Moriaty."

The Vicar put his child down.

"Vangel engaged to marry May Moriaty! I'm heartily glad to hear it. Now we sha'nt lose our village beauty, for it is to be hoped her parents will not permit her to leave them."

"Oh, you need not be afraid of *that*," replies his wife coldly, "for Mr. Moriaty has settled to buy Wotton House for them to reside in, so that they will be close at our gates."

"I am delighted, I shall take no more excuses from

the pretty May for not coming to church on account of the distance. Why, Charlotte, this seems to me like the finger of Providence bringing the dear girl (as it were) to our very doors."

"I have never been on very intimate terms with Miss Moriaty myself, Andrew, and so I cannot see what difference her future proximity will make to me."

"But you must become intimate with her, my dear. It is your duty. As an unmarried girl you may not have had much in common, but when she is Mrs. Lewis Vangel, things will be altered. You must draw her into the church, and her husband too, if possible. It is your mission."

"Old Mrs. Vangel has been here. She is to live with them," continued Mrs. Crosbie.

"Better and better," says the Vicar, rubbing his palms. "We shall gain the whole family. Ah, my Charlotte, here is a precious task placed in your very hands."

"I trust I have never been backward in doing my duty in that way, Andrew."

"Never, my dear, never. But this is really an exceptional case. These young people will be rich in the future, decidedly so, and they may reside in Withyslea all their lives. Then they will have enormous influence over the elders, whose interest will be all wrapt up in them, and if you bring *them* to regard the Church and Her needs in a proper light, you gain the whole family. Oh, I see untold possibilities in the conversion of the Vangels."

"Young Vangel is almost a heathen," snaps the pure-souled Charlotte. "I believe he is an atheist."

"No, no, my love. Don't hint at such a thing. He is not a church-goer at present, it is true, but he has never opposed the truth when presented to him, and he is the *sort of man* whom marriage will bring to a better way of *thinking*. When he has some little treasures like these,"

says the Vicar smiling at his children, "climbing about his knee, his soul will open to the necessity of an abiding place for them from sin and sorrow."

And the Reverend Andrew (who is not a bad fellow at heart, though very weak, and rather fond of the flesh-pots of Egypt) kisses his little ones with real affection.

"You think better of him than I do," replies his wife. "I have reason to believe Doctor Vangel to be both deceitful and impertinent, and the Moriats will find it out, perhaps, to their own cost. However, the matter is settled, and they are to be married on the first of December, and Miss Moriats is to receive twenty thousand pounds down on her wedding day."

"A very nice little sum," says her husband; "and will keep them comfortably until the old people go home. My dear, the Lewis Vangels will be an important family by-and-by. You must on no account offend them."

"I am not likely to do *that*," replies Mrs. Crosbie, with the old toss of her head; "it is *they* who offend *me*. And they are going to live just opposite poor Cassie. So trying for her."

Miss Prew commences to wail anew.

"I shall never be able to go out into my little garden without seeing or hearing them. It will be a constant agony. And to see Doctor Vangel's horse each morning turning out of the same stable-yard that my dear lamented papa's horse turned out of. I think it will half kill me."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaims the Vicar good-naturedly. "It will be a great pleasure, you mean! May Moriats is a sweet-tempered girl, and will let you run in and out as you please. Why, she will be charming company for you, Miss Prew, and enliven your existence. You ought to be delighted at the prospect."

"I want no company but that of my dear friend here," says Miss Prew, extending her claws sentimentally to Mrs. Crosbie.

"Well, I consider this is one of the best things that has ever happened for Withyslea, and I shall expect everyone in *my* house to follow my example, and meet the young couple on terms of cordiality," exclaims the Vicar, turning to leave the room. "Charlotte, my love, I should like a cup of tea sent into my study. I have some work to finish before dinner-time," and his gaiters and cassock disappear as he concludes.

The ladies glance at one another.

"You see what a martyr I am," sighs Mrs. Crosbie.

"Poor dear. It will be a terrible effort for you to make."

"But inevitable! For the Church's sake we must, of course, give up all private opinions."

"You will call on the Moriats and offer your congratulations, then?"

"The *Vicar* will insist on it. Yes; I shall go to-morrow."

"How good you are! You would sacrifice all feeling to a sense of duty!"

"Of course. For what else are we here? Will you go with me?"

"Willingly! Where you lead, who would not follow? And, perhaps, as the dear Vicar says, it will only be right of me to try and overcome my natural aversion to seeing Wotton House occupied again, and establish myself on a friendly footing there instead."

"I think so. If you can stand Mary Moriats and Mrs. Vangel, there will doubtless be advantages to be gained from an intimacy with them. They are sure to give nice parties, and keep a good table. The old people will take care of that. Besides, the garden will be a pleasant lounge for you."

"Ah, the dear old garden," cries Cassie, with clasped *hands*. "I wonder if the little plot of ground is marked *out still*, where I planted mustard and cress as a thought-

less child? I haven't been in the place for years. The Leaton lawyers have forbidden the caretaker to admit any visitors for a long time past."

"Well, it will rest with yourself now, I fancy, whether you see it again or not, and, as a preliminary, I will drive you up to the Manor House in my pony-chaise to-morrow afternoon. To think that Lewis Vangel will be probably driving on his rounds in a carriage and two horses, while I have to be contented with a basket-chair! The ways of Providence are inscrutable."

"It is *injustice!*" cries her jackal.

"Hush, dear! Let us remember that we are but worms, and that, before long, rich and poor will alike be dust in the silent tomb," and with this aphorism (from which they appear to derive much comfort), the pious ladies take leave of one another.

In consequence of the decision at the Vicarage, the family at the Manor House are astonished by the amount of hearty congratulations on the coming event that pours in upon them from every side. Mary Moriarty declares she had no idea how pleasant and friendly the people of Withyslea could be, until her engagement was made known amongst them; and especially does she blame herself for having thought and spoken unkindly of Mrs. Crosbie and Miss Prew, who both seem so anxious for her future welfare. When we are assured of our own happiness, little worries cease to annoy us, and everything appears in a brighter and better light.

And May is especially happy now. All her troubles are forgotten, and she is joyous and buoyant as a child, and wild as a young colt. She beams upon all her visitors, and talks with them freely of her prospects, and no one takes offence at anything she says or does, or gives vent to the least doubt that all she anticipates will come true. Doctor Vangel is not present at these complimentary visits. He purposely avoids them, but he can-

not hide himself altogether, and everybody he meets in his daily rounds stops to shake him by the hand, and congratulate him on his approaching marriage. He is wise enough to take most of their good wishes for what they are worth. He knows that he has won a prize in Mary Moriaty, and that each day of intimate communion draws them nearer together, and he cares nothing for what other people may think of their mutual relations. Yet he is not ungrateful. Mrs. Crosbie, indeed, thinks the young doctor more disagreeable than usual when she "button-holes" him one day to listen to a long set speech, full of falsehood and flattery, and is rewarded by his taking off his hat and leaving her as soon as it is over, but when James Thrupp says, in his rough manner,—“I’ve heard the good news, sir, and I wish you and that sweet young lady all the joy as you deserve, and I can’t say better than that,” Lewis thanks the old man with something very like moisture in his eyes. Yet, when May calls upon him to admire the anti-macassars, and teapot cosies, and brush and comb bags, that continue to arrive for her by the dozen from all the ladies of the neighborhood, he tosses them on one side with a look very much like contempt.

“You cynical, ungrateful wretch!” cries May, laughing, “you do not consider how long it has taken the poor girls to put in all these stitches. And you are actually sitting on my plush table-cover, and crushing it out of recognition. Get up, sir, do! If you won’t admire my wedding presents, you shall at least not spoil them.”

“Take the horrid things out of my sight, May. They remind me of my pet abomination—a fancy fair. I wonder how many of your acquaintances would have taken the trouble to work this rubbish if you had been coming to me without a halfpenny?”

“Why, Lewis, we should have wanted them more *then*.”

"Perhaps ; but you wouldn't have got them. All these gaudy, vulgar things represent so many dinner-parties, and tea-parties and dances at Wotton House. You will not possibly be able to leave out the names of your dear 'five hundred friends' who sent you the red bags, and the blue mats, and that atrocious yellow thing there with the white flowers on it."

"Oh, come, that is too bad of you," exclaims May, brandishing a yellow satin sofa-cushion, embroidered in æsthetic lilies, in his face. "This is the handsomest piece of work I have received for my drawing-room, and *who* do you think it came from?"

"Can't guess. The butcher's wife?"

"*The butcher's wife!* If the donor could hear you talk like that, she would faint straight off. It was Mrs. Crosbie—actually Mrs. Crosbie! and she sent such a kind note with it, wishing me all sorts of happiness."

"My name was not included, I suppose?"

"She didn't mention your name, but of course it was meant for us both. What happiness can I ever have now without you? Are not our lives and interests to be *one*, dear?"

"I trust so, May. But Mrs. Crosbie cares no more about your happiness than that cat does. Puss purrs when you stroke her, and stretches herself out at full length, because she likes the warmth of the fireside and the touch of your hand; and Mrs. Crosbie will purr so long as you please her and she pleases herself, and no longer."

May looks very wistful as she stands before him, twisting the sofa cushion about in her hands.

"Aren't you just a little hard upon her, Lewis dear? I know I have often said I hated her (and I never *shall* like her, quite), but I think she is trying her best now to make up for any unpleasantness in the past. And the Vicar is *so* kind. He came here yesterday, and had a long talk with me, and he spoke so nicely of you and my

duties as a wife, that he made me cry. And he said he hoped that, when we were neighbors, they should see a great deal of both of us, so I feel sure he likes us, and wishes to be friends."

Lewis pulls a long face.

"Mrs. Crosbie will never see much of *me*," he answers. "We are not *simpatica*. But I shall never wish to exercise the least control over you in such matters, May. So long as your acquaintances are respectable, see whom you like, and go where you like. I shall always have my study to retreat to if Miss Prew tries to sit in my lap, or take any undue familiarity of that kind."

May goes off into a fit of laughter at the idea of the old maid perched upon Lewis's knee. But the moment after she is serious again.

"Lewis," she says, in a coaxing voice, "there is something I want to ask you."

"Well, love, what is it?"

"About the servants for Wotton House. Mother has engaged a cook and parlor-maid, but the housemaid's place is not filled; may I offer it to Ruth Williams?"

"You want to take Ruth Williams into our house?"

May nods her head in silence.

"Is she fit for it, May? Can she perform the duties of a housemaid?"

"I don't know; but she could stay here whilst we were away, and mother's housemaid, Anne, would soon teach her."

"It seems rather risky, dear; why are you so anxious to employ Ruth Williams?"

"She is so unhappy, Lewis; I saw her the other day, and she said she felt as if she should throw herself into the river," replies May in a low voice, and with her eyes bent upon the ground; "no one will engage her for farm or house work, and all her friends have turned their backs on her. What can she do? where will she go? It is too cruel."

"Poor girl, I am sorry for her, but it is the usual consequence of a fault like hers ; she must pay the penalty of her wrong-doing. She does not suffer alone."

"But many people who—who have been just as—as bad as she is are never found out," says May falteringly.

"True, dear, but they are none the less guilty, and their consciences may, perhaps prove a bitterer punishment to them than poor Ruth's open shame."

May thinks for a little while before she answers.

"Lewis, you said that day in Outram Wood that you honored me for despising the conventionalities of the world, and wishing to befriend Ruth Williams."

"So I did, dear, and I meant it."

"May I not befriend her now, then? If she came into our service, it might be the salvation of her, she is so very hopeless and despairing, and when I am going to be so happy, it makes me feel almost afraid to see her suffer ; don't you think I might do this thing, just in gratitude for my own—my own preservation?"

She speaks very low and very confusedly, but Lewis Vangel seems to understand all she would say to him. He pulls her down beside him on the ottoman, and kisses the white brow she leans against his shoulder.

"Yes, darling," he answers, "you may do just as you please about it. It will be a Christian and a womanly act to save this poor girl from further degradation. Let her become our housemaid by all manner of means. But what will Mrs. Crosbie say?"

"*Mrs. Crosbie!*" repeats the girl ; "Oh, Mrs. Crosbie is not going to be the mistress of Wotton House ; and Lewis, I am so much obliged to you for consenting to it. I want so much to try and do a little good now, to be a little better than I have ever been, because I am so happy and so grateful. I know I am a thoughtless girl. I have never cared for going to church, or anything of that sort, but I *shall* care now, Lewis, because I feel I have so much to thank God for."

He presses her very closely to him as she speaks, but at first he does not answer. When he does, he says briefly,—

“We have *both* very much to be grateful for, May, and you may depend upon it that *I* will never prevent your doing what you may consider to be your duty, whatever form it may take. And, with regard to Ruth Williams, settle it your own way.”

And so Ruth is installed at the Manor House without further delay, and trained in the duties of a housemaid.

Meanwhile, the wedding-day approaches with lightning speed. Lewis and May see each other constantly, but the young man will not abrogate one jot or tittle of his professional duties, and all his evenings are taken up by study, so that their interviews are necessarily brief; Lewis is a little impatient, too, of the marriage preparations. It is quite right, he tells himself, that the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty should be married in a manner becoming their means, but it makes the contrast of his own poverty very obtrusive. When he is called upon to admire the satins and brocades and laces, and remembers what a struggle it has been to him to purchase his modest wedding outfit, his proud nature is apt to give him a rebellious twinge. He would have liked to present May with jewels worthy of her acceptance for the auspicious occasion, and yet, rather than procure them on credit, and pay for them with money that is rightly hers, he will go to her with only the plain gold ring which he can purchase without help; but, though he has accepted the position, and intends to fill it honorably, he suffers bitterly. Do you know that it is far more difficult to receive than to bestow, and that the man who can accept a favor gratefully is more generous than he who offers it. There is nothing so delightful than to be able to give; it is a pleasure to *one's self*, a genuine satisfaction, and many rich people *whose names* are lauded to the skies for their charity and

liberality are, in reality, only gratifying their own feelings, without any denial to themselves. Often the friend who gives up his time to visit you, or to take trouble on your account, or to write you a long cheery letter when you are depressed, is more really generous than the one who sends you a check drawn with a stroke of his pen, the amount of which he will never miss from his banking book. Lewis Vangel realizes painfully, during these few weeks of preparation, that he is but the Prince Consort to this young Queen of Withyslea, and that all the adulation and good-wishes are laid at her feet, and not his.

Mrs. Vangel enjoys it all thoroughly, and considers herself of quite as much importance as the bride and bridegroom, while she talks of Wotton House as though it were being prepared for her reception only. Lewis is glad to see his mother so happy, and Mr. and Mrs. Moriatty's kindness and generosity to him knows no bounds. He has every reason to consider himself a very fortunate young man, and he would not give up the prospect of marrying May for all the world, and yet he is very thoughtful, and not half so elated as Withyslea considers he ought to be. It has been decided that he is to take his bride to Devonshire for the honeymoon, and his future father-in-law, in discussing the route with him, thrusts a check into his hands for travelling expenses, which he steadily refuses to accept.

"No, sir," he exclaims, passing it back again, "I beg of you—I pray of you—not to insist upon my keeping this. These are expenses which rightly fall upon me. I cannot defray them with your money."

"But, my dear boy, this is absurd of you," argues Mr. Moriatty, "I know your resources, and that you cannot possibly undertake a trip of this sort without running into debt. And then, where will your pleasure be, or my girl's either? Now, Lewis, look here. You are not likely to have another honeymoon (at all events during my life-

time), and so I mean to see you through this one. If you won't take my check, I can't help it, but I shall pay it into the Leaton Bank in your name, and open an account for you there."

And when Lewis makes inquiries on the subject, he finds that Mr. Moriaty has deposited double the amount of the check to his credit. He is evidently determined that his daughter shall not suffer from the impecuniosity of her husband. That is the way Lewis reads it, as he determines that the money shall be spent on May's comfort, and not his own. Nothing occurs to check the consummation of this fortunate love affair. On the first of December the church at Withyslea is decorated throughout with white flowers—the wedding-breakfast is ready, the guests are assembled, and Lewis Vangel swears in their presence that, forsaking all others, he will keep to May, and May only, until death comes to part them.

CHAPTER XIX.

A HAPPY HOME.

ANNA VANGEL is in the train journeying to Withyslea, her kind eyes beaming with anticipation. She was not present at her brother's wedding. She has attained a high standing amongst the nurses of St. Swithin's Hospital, and her services could not be dispensed with at the time. But now she has obtained a month's leave, and is all excitement at setting off for a holiday. Of course she has heard all about the grand doings in Withyslea. Crossed pages from old Mrs. Vangel, and voluminous letters from Lewis, filled with the praises of his young wife, have given her the greatest pleasure. For to no one, perhaps, *has the knowledge of Lewis Vangel's good fortune afforded so much satisfaction as to his devoted sister.* Being

strongly attached to her brother, his want of means and insignificant position have always been a greater source of regret to her than her own. She wanted Lewis to rise and have an opportunity of displaying his undeniable talents. She hated to think of him chained down to the monotonous round of duty in a country village, and without any prospect of an increase to his inadequate income. And then, all of a sudden, she hears that he is to have the wife he has longed for, a good house, and sufficient means to keep up the establishment of a gentleman.

At first she can hardly believe in such a stroke of luck, and when she does believe it she is overjoyed. Not one spark of envy mingles with her unmixed congratulation. Not one thought that her own lot is unlikely to suffer any change, and that she will probably toil on as an hospital nurse until old age compels her to relinquish work. Her dear Lewis is provided for for life, and Anna's heart is at rest concerning him. And not a little triumphant is she, in her quiet way, to remember that she foretold the coming of these good things, and encouraged Lewis to persevere in his suit for Mary Moriarty's hand. Anna hopes, as she travels homeward, that May will not let her feel the great difference between them. She knows little of her sister-in-law, except from hearsay. She has scarcely done more than see her during her own infrequent visits to Withyslea. She remembers her perfectly as a bright and beautiful girl—always well dressed, sometimes extravagantly so—and apparently lapped in luxury, but she knows nothing of her character or disposition. She is not in the least surprised that any woman can love and appreciate Lewis; but she cannot help being curious to see how the spoiled and petted child of the Moriats gets on with her plain-spoken old mother and her quiet, uneffusive brother. As the train approaches the Leaton station, she wonders if Lewis's multifarious duties will permit him to meet her there. She never supposes for a moment

that the bride will drive eight miles on a cold January afternoon to welcome an unknown sister-in-law. She is not long kept in doubt, however. As the train runs alongside the platform, the first thing she sees is Lewis's handsome face, beaming with smiles, whilst beside him stands his wife, in a long gray cloak trimmed with fur, and a gray hat and feathers, looking almost as pleased as himself. And as soon as Anna (who is dressed in her hospital uniform, with a brown gauze veil pinned over her close straw bonnet) steps out of the railway carriage—she finds herself closely folded in May's arms, and kissed as warmly as if she had been her own sister.

"Oh, Anna! I am so glad you have arrived. The train is twenty minutes late. We were so afraid you had had an accident. Come along, dear, at once. We have brought the carriage for you. Lewis will see after your luggage."

She hurries her out of the station, where Anna sees a barouche and a couple of horses, with a footman in attendance, waiting for them.

"What a beautiful carriage!" she exclaims. "Surely that is not yours?"

May laughs merrily.

"No, dear! we haven't quite arrived at that yet, though there is no knowing what we *may* do, is there, Lewis? This is my mother's carriage, Anna, but, as she didn't want to use it to-day, I borrowed it to fetch you home in. Is that your box? Put it in the rumble, John," continues May to the footman, "and then drive to Wotton House."

"But won't it scratch the panels?" inquires Anna anxiously—her travelling trunk being of the good old-fashioned sort, clasped with iron bands and studded with nails.

"Oh, never mind!" cries May. "They never fuss about such things at the Manor House. Carriages were *made to use*, not to look at. And now," she continues,

appealing to her husband as she clasps both Anna's hands in hers, "isn't it *good*, darling, to have her here?"

"Good?" he echoes, bending forward to kiss his sister's face, "it is the one thing that was wanting to complete my happiness."

Anna can hardly answer them. Her pleasure and surprise render her dumb.

"I hardly hoped," she says, after a pause, to May, "that you would welcome me like this."

"Didn't you? Oh, Anna! what a shame! And when I have been longing to see you so! I have never had a sister until now, and Lewis knows how I have looked forward to your arrival. Don't you, Lewis?"

"Yes, my sweetheart!"

"And your room is all ready for you, Anna. I took such pleasure in arranging it; and if you would live there always, we should be so glad."

"That is impossible, my dear, kind May; but for a few weeks I shall be very happy to stay with you. And to think of your driving all this distance on such a cold day just to meet me! It is kind of you. I feel it from the bottom of my heart."

"Why, Anna, do you think I would have let you arrive without a soul to welcome you home? I didn't know till the last minute whether Lewis would be able to come with me or not. You know how horrid it is with doctors, always being called out at a moment's notice; and mother has a slight cold to-day, so I might have been the only one to meet you."

"*Mother?*" says Anna interrogatively.

"*Our* mother, she means," replies Lewis smiling. "May always call her so."

"Yes, *our* mother," repeats the young wife decidedly. "Isn't she *my* mother, too?"

"Oh! my dear girl, yes," replies Anna, "and I am sure Lewis thinks it very sweet of you to say so."

"Oh! Lewis and I are never going to keep anything to ourselves, are we, Lewis?" exclaims May, with a bright smile and glance at her husband.

"Nothing, nor *from* each other either," he answers carelessly.

The young wife's bright look suddenly fades; Anna, watching her, wonders why.

"No, nor *from* each other either," she echoes, in a fainter tone.

"You will be surprised when you see our house," remarks Lewis to his sister. "It is really beautiful. Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty have been most generous, and furnished it in royal style."

"And we have the loveliest garden, with a box-tree walk two hundred years old," says May, recovering herself.

"And grand old stables, and a poultry run, and two paddocks," continues Lewis.

"And father gave us a pony chaise for a Christmas box," says Mary; "and he has promised to give Lewis a cow on his next birthday. We are always going to choose useful presents now, like cows and horses, until we are quite stocked."

"Or over-stocked," laughs her husband. Meanwhile, we get all our milk, butter, eggs, and vegetables from the Manor House, and the use of everything the dear people there possess."

"And mamma strips her hothouses of fruit and flowers for us," adds May. "Poor old Crabbe, the gardener, is in despair. He told her the other day that at this rate he thought Miss Mary had better come back again, for she'd been twice the trouble and expense since she'd gone over to Wotton House."

"Ah, May, Crabbe knows, with the rest of the world, *what a very bad bargain you have made in marrying me,*" says Lewis.

"Be quiet sir and don't impugn my good taste in that way. If you *are* a bad bargain, I like a bad bargain, and that's sufficient. How does it strike you, Anna?"

"It strikes me that you are two of the most fortunate young people I have ever met."

"And the happiest," adds Lewis, with a dreamy look at his wife.

"And the happiest," echoes May, as she clasps her hand in his.

Anna glances from one to the other, from Lewis's glowing smile to May's beautiful face, and feels suddenly so overcome with gratitude and emotion, that she can only murmur in a choking voice, "God bless you both!" For they are the very picture of content. Lewis's scruples concerning his wife's superior fortune appear to be overcome, or thrust into the background, whilst May's undefined trouble has died a natural death. They have come to a full understanding with each other, and are on the best term of confidence and unity of purpose. By the time they reach Withyslea, Anna Vangel feels almost as happy as they are themselves.

"Here we are at home," exclaims May suddenly. "Now, Anna, you must admire everything about Wotton House, or I shall be terribly disappointed. It's all as old as the hills, remember, except Lewis and me. Oh! there's Miss Prew watching us from behind her blinds, as usual. We cannot go in or out without her being there. Horrid old maid! I can't bear her."

"Don't abuse old maids, May," says Anna, laughing, "because *I* intend to join the confraternity."

"No such thing, Anna. Lewis and I mean to go abroad when he can get away, and then we'll take you with us, and you shall pick up a delightful young husband somewhere, and bring him home with you."

"What a prospect!" cries Anna, as she jumps out of the carriage. "But there is my dear old mother waiting

for me on the door-step. Oh, mother! what a happy meeting this is. What a wonderful change for dear Lewis and you. Are you not very glad for all that has come to pass?"

"Oh, Anna, my dear girl, I don't know when I have been so comfortable. And May is like a daughter to me. But come in out of the cold. This is my own sitting-room. May insisted it should be so, that I might feel quite free and independent. Isn't it pretty? And I have all the little old treasures about me still, you see. But sit down, my dear, and remove your bonnet. You must be cold and tired after your long journey."

"Mother, dear, will you have tea served here or in the drawing-room?" asks May, thrusting her bright face in at the door.

"Here, my dear, if it is all the same to you," replies Mrs. Vangel.

"All right. But you will have to endure me with it to-day, for I can't give up Anna quite so soon," she calls out, with a smile, as she disappears.

"What a sweet girl she seems," remarks Anna.

"Oh, my dear, she is a perfect angel. Always bright and smiling, and devoted to Lewis. I never saw a couple so much in love with each other. I thought, when they returned from the honeymoon, they would have sobered 'down a little; but not a bit of it. And your brother's not the same man. You know how quiet and subdued he has always been for his age, and now I am sometimes almost afraid his levity will endanger his profession. Just hark at him this moment!" exclaims Mrs. Vangel, as a peal of laughter echoes from the hall, "They are romping together like two children. It is always so when he is at home."

"Dear boy. You see him really happy for the first time in his life," says Anna. "But I am bound to say he never neglects you mother."

"Never, my dear, and May is as good as he is. Mr. and Mrs. Moriatty, too, are very kind. They are here almost every day, and always asking me to dine at the Manor House. But I prefer my own room, Anna, and am quite happy here whilst the dear children are absent. And it was so sweet of May to wish me to live with them.

"She has a kind heart. She could not have borne to think of you all alone in that dilapidated little cottage. This is a lovely room, mother. I shall be so glad, when I return to work, to picture you sitting in comfort and quiet here."

"Yes, I have much to be grateful for, my dear. My son was always so good to me, I used to dread his marrying. But his marriage has relieved me of all anxiety. We live in the greatest comfort. The Manor House people never come here without leaving game, and fruit, and all sorts of luxuries behind them, and May drives me out in her pony chaise every day, or Mrs. Moriatty takes me in the carriage, till I'm quite the envy of Withyslea."

"As you may well be, mother," says Anna.

At that moment a neat and pretty, but sad-looking, young woman enters the room with a tea-tray, which she proceeds to place on an occasional table.

"What an interesting girl," remarks Anna, as she disappears; "but is she delicate? She is very pale."

"I believe not. Now, though May is the dearest girl in the world," says Mrs. Vangel, "*that* is a fad of hers I cannot understand. When there are so many well-behaved and good-looking young women in Withyslea, to pick out Ruth Williams for one of her servants! She is the under-housemaid, and takes complete charge of my room."

"Is not Ruth well-behaved, then?"

"Oh, no, my dear, on the contrary. But here is your brother, so we will drop the subject for the present."

Lewis walks into the room with the question,—
"Where's my wife?"

"She is sure to be down to her tea in a minute, dear," says his mother.

Anna pulls her brother down on the settee beside her.

"*Where's my wife?*" she repeats playfully. "How strange it seems to hear you saying those words so naturally, Lewis. What business have *you* with a wife, I should like to know?"

"Ah! that's what I ask myself, Anna. But there's no doubt of the fact, all the same. What do you think of the whole arrangement?"

"I have had no time to think. I have not done wondering yet at your good fortune. Lewis, do you remember the conversation we held together last summer in the orchard of the old cottage?"

"Perfectly. I must have made myself most unpleasant to you, Anna. I try to forget all the past misery now, and live only in the present."

"But don't you think," she asks gently, "that it enhances present pleasure to recall the difficulties through which we attained it, Lewis?"

"Not always, dear. Sometimes we have suffered too much to make the memory anything but pain. But you can see that I am happy *now*, can't you?"

"Thank God, yes. How could you be otherwise? Lewis, I think you have the sweetest wife in the world, and so does mother, which is of far greater consequence."

"Yes, the old lady and May get on splendidly together. You see my wife is such a child still that she is only too delighted to have the cares of housekeeping taken off her hands, and mother likes pottering about the kitchen and storeroom; so they suit each other admirably. But May is not idle——"

"Who's taking my name in vain?" cries May, darting into the room.

She has changed her walking dress for a high white frock, that makes her look younger than before.

"I'm saying you're an idle girl, and leave all the house-keeping to mother," replies her husband, with a look of admiration.

"What a libel! Mother likes it; don't you, mother? And I'm not idle. I'm awfully busy just now making a hospital——"

"Making *what*?" exclaims Anna.

"A hospital, dear, and you've just come in time to help me. You must know Lewis has always wanted a cottage hospital in Withyslea for his bad cases, and as the house he holds under his appointment is still his, we are going to use it for that purpose. Isn't it a lovely idea?"

"A most excellent idea," acquiesces her sister-in-law.

"I am looking after all the furnishing part of it, you know—like the blinds and the curtains, and sheets and blankets—and I made mamma subscribe ten pounds to my fund yesterday."

"Poor long-suffering mamma," interpolates Lewis comically.

"Not at all Lewis. She is bound to give something to charities, so she may just as well patronize mine. And the Vicar has subscribed two guineas, which is very well for him, considering he has a lot of children, and I'm going the round of the farmhouses to see what I can collect from them. They ought to give something, you know, because their laborers might need the hospital at any time."

"And what is Lewis going to do for his share?" asks Anna.

"He left all his furniture for their use."

"Lovely furniture," laughs Lewis; "but perhaps our invalids will not be particular."

"It was good enough for *you*, darling," says May sympathetically, "so I am sure it must be so for them. But Lewis has persuaded some of the young men about here to lend us their services, and they have whitewashed

the walls and ceilings, and mended the broken furniture, till it begins to look quite respectable."

"All we really want now is four or five good beds, and then we shall be ready for the next outbreak of fever or bad accident," adds Lewis.

"Papa will give us those," says May confidently. "I was talking to him about it yesterday, and telling him it is his duty to assist us, and he said he would think about it. And papa's thinking always ends in a check. He is a dear, good old soul."

"You appear to me to be surrounded by 'good old souls,'" remarks Anna wonderingly. "You have but to ask for a thing to receive it. You are living on a species of enchanted ground."

"Mr. and Mrs. Moriaty are two of the kindest-hearted and most benevolent people in the world," replies her brother. "They hold the rare belief that their money was given to them in trust for others, as well as themselves, and seem never so happy as when they are dispensing it. They don't stop to ask if a man is deserving. If he is in need, they relieve him to the best of their ability. See how they bestowed May on my unworthy self," he continues, laughing, as he pulls his wife's ear.

"Well, I certainly am the best they had to bestow," replies May thoughtfully, "because they had not another; but oh! Lewis" (with a sudden burst of feeling), "how I wish I were a thousand times better than I am."

Anna expects her brother to resent this ridiculous remark, but he does not. He only pulls May gently down upon his knee, and kisses her softly on the forehead once or twice. The girl kisses him back again, and then, rising, proceeds in silence to help old Mrs. Vangel to pour out the tea. Anna reverts to the subject of the hospital.

"Who is to be the presiding female genius?" she asks.

"I am!" replies May promptly.

"You will visit it occasionally, dear, and see that all is going on right, no doubt, but Lewis will never allow you to nurse the patients. Supposing you had cases of scarlet fever—the very first that have to be separated from their families—you would run the risk of spreading the disease, and, still worse, of contracting it yourself."

"Then I could stay at the hospital altogether."

"Oh, May, it would not be a fit life for you. You are not thinking of the terrible anxiety you would cause, both at the Manor House and your own home. Lewis, you would never let her do it?"

He smiles pityingly at her credulity.

"As if it were likely. Do you think I value her so little as that? May shall never endanger her health. It is far too precious."

At this assertion the girl turns round from the tea-tray with a look almost of dismay.

"Oh, darling! don't say that. How can I ever do any good in this world if I am to be always wrapt up in cotton wool and tissue paper? And I have begun to love sick people, ever since poor Ellen Thrupp died in my arms. They are so grateful and so sad, and it is so wonderful to think they're on the brink of discovering all the mysteries which puzzle our brains even to think of. Anna, if I wasn't married, I would go back to St. Swithin's Hospital with you, and spend the rest of my life in nursing and relieving the sick."

"It's a very good thing for you that you are married, Mrs. Vangel," laughs Lewis, "or you would be turning into a missionary. You dream too much as it is, my darling. You must not forget that your duty lies as much to the poor people *inside* the house as the poor people *outside*. If you do, I shall have to fall sick in order to keep you at home, and I shall be a terrible tiresome patient, I warn you, May. I shall never allow my nurse to leave my side."

The tears have started into May's bright eyes.

"Oh! don't talk about your falling sick, Lewis. It makes me nervous. I couldn't bear it. If anything happened to you, I should die."

And it takes some minutes before her husband's kindly jesting on her weakness has sent the threatening tears back to their sources, and stilled the trembling of the girlish hand.

"A sweet, loving disposition, but a very nervous temperament," is Anna Vangel's comment on this little incident, a few hours later, as she is talking alone with her brother. "What makes May so sensitive, Lewis? Was she always so?"

"No," he answers. (He cannot tell an untruth, even on a subject like the present, which he would gladly have avoided.) "She was very self-confident and courageous, and possesses a strong and healthy organization. But she—she has not been so well the last six months, and it has had an effect upon her constitution."

"She is growing still, perhaps."

"Yes, she is growing still, body and soul. I am obliged to be very careful of her, and see that she is neither over excited nor over fatigued. She will make a glorious woman, please God, by-and-by."

"I am sure of it. Meanwhile, my dear brother, you have a great responsibility on your hands. You must be careful how you influence her for good or evil."

"Do you think me capable of doing the latter?"

"Not consciously, certainly, but a wife is very liable to imbibe her husband's principles, if he discusses them before her. You know, Lewis, that I have never argued with you on religion. I refrain for two reasons. One is, that I consider all men's minds should be left free and unbiassed in such matters; the second, that I do not consider I have any right to suppose that my method, or opinion, is better than your own. But I know you do

not go to church, and—and—I hope you won't dissuade dear May from doing so. If it does not do her any good, it can never do her harm."

"I am not quite so sure of that, Anna. I think that, to an emotional girl, without any settled principles, and a spirit (as you may call it) half formed, the services that go on in Mr. Crosbie's church *might* do (I only say *might*) a great deal of harm, by inciting her on to what I should term hysterical devotion. Still, I am quite of your opinion that religion is a matter strictly between our souls and God, and should not be interfered with by any third person. You may be assured, then, that I shall leave May perfectly unbiassed. She has been used to go to church, and she goes there still. Sometimes I accompany her, but it is merely a matter of form, and so that she may not always be seen alone, or with mother. The more I see of Mr. Crosbie's services, the less I like them."

"I don't think many Englishmen *do* care for ritualistic practices," replies his sister, "and neither do I. But if we go to church in a right spirit, it little signifies what we meet there. The blessing returns on us all the same."

Anna Vangel is really a religious woman, that is, she loves God, and desires to please Him, without caring in the slightest degree what people may think of her method of doing so. Loving Him, she naturally likes to talk of Him, but she never intrudes the subject in the offensive manner of some pietists, any more than she would introduce the name of a dear friend in a company where she felt it would be ridiculed. She is too jealous of His honor—too mindful of His dignity. Though she dearly loves her brother, she has never tried to make him see religious matters with her eyes. She has had too much confidence in his good sense and right feeling, and too much modesty not to believe that, in his own way, he is living as good a life as she is. But she would not like to hear him bias his wife's mind against the forms of religion.

May is very young and impressional, and she is evidently very fond of her husband. The strong meat he may be able to digest might prove poisonous to her. The tempest he may ride over safely might be her destruction. Anna ponders over this question for some time after she retires to bed, and she is thinking of it the next morning as she dresses herself. It is Sunday. The church bells are ringing out a call to matins, and Anna is in a thankful disposition. She feels it will calm her somewhat excited temperament to begin the day with prayer. As she reaches the iron gate of Wotton House, a light step runs down the gravel after her. She turns at the sound, and there, to her surprise, is May, blooming like a rose, and evidently bent on the same errand as herself.

"Oh, Anna, are you going to matins? I am so glad. I am coming too."

"*May!* This *is* a pleasant surprise," says Anna, kissing her, "though I hope I am not responsible for waking you?"

"No, not at all. I didn't know you were up till I opened the hall door."

"Is Lewis coming? Does he know you are going to church?"

May laughs merrily as she links her arm in that of her sister-in-law.

"Dear Anna, don't you know Lewis never goes to church, especially in the mornings? As for matins, I don't think he is aware of such a service. But I like it, and he has never forbidden my attendance."

"And he never will," replies Anna, squeezing her arm in a friendly manner. "He is too good to interfere with your religion, and some day your quiet example may bring him to like it too. But I didn't know you were interested in it, May."

"No more I was—*always*," says the girl bashfully; "*but the last few months have made me think more seri-*

ously than I ever did before. I have been a good deal amongst the poor, and I have thought——”

“Well, dear?”

“I have seen something of sickness and of death,” continues May, correcting herself, “and it is an awful thought that they might come to any of us at any time, and find us unprepared.”

“You are right, dear. That is the good that nursing the sick and dying does for us. It makes us *think*. I owe a great deal to my vocation as nurse that I can never be sufficiently grateful for.”

. They have reached the church by this time (which, indeed, lies at their very gates), and enter it in silence. It is rather dark, and cold—it not being considered necessary to light all the gas for matin-song, which is thinly attended. A couple of candles on the altar light up the brass cross and pots of flowers with a sickly glare, and reveal the presence of some dozen worshippers scattered at intervals about the seats, amongst which the “pure-souled Charlotte” is conspicuous by the extravagance of her genuflections, and the profundity of her prayers. On one side of the chancel, close to the sacristy door, stands the confessional, the suggestion of which created so much ire in Mrs. Moriaty’s honest breast. It is supposed to be fashioned after the models of Catholic confessionals, but it looks very much like an oversized meat safe, with a red curtain drawn in front of it. Anna sees May glance several times at this innovation during the service, and, as soon as it is over and they have left the church, she mentions it.

“Did you see the confessional, Anna? I thought the bishop had forbidden its erection, but Mr. Crosbie has put it there, all the same. He is very bold! I wonder what mamma will say. She declared, if it was introduced, she would never put her foot in the church again. She has such a horror of anything like Roman Catholicism. Anna, what do you think about it? Do tell me. Can it do *one* any good to confess?”

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

SHE speaks so earnestly that Anna turns to her in some surprise.

"Can it do one any good to confess, May? In what way? I don't quite catch your meaning."

May stammers a little as she replies,—

"My father is a Catholic, you know, although he never goes to a Catholic church now. He used to confess regularly when he was a boy, and I have heard him say he is sorry he ever gave up the practice. Mamma is against it, of course, but Mr. Crosbie says it is a direct duty, and that our sins will never be forgiven us without it."

"I quite agree with Mr. Crosbie."

"Oh, Anna, do you go to confession, then?"

"Twice a day, I hope. Whenever I say my prayers."

"Ah, you don't mean the same thing as I do. You confess to God."

"We all do that, surely, May?"

"Yes, but without the assistance of a priest. Mr. Crosbie declares the priest's intervention is necessary in order to procure absolution."

"*There I don't* agree with Mr. Crosbie!"

"You consider it would be very wrong, or foolish, perhaps, to go into a confessional—that we can confess as effectually in our own room, and by ourselves?—that the priest's absolution is useless. Is that what you mean, Anna?" asks May anxiously.

"No, dear, I don't quite mean that either. I think there are some cases in which a course of confession would be *very useful*, and some people to whom it would prove a *great help and assistance*. I don't presume either to con-

demn or to recommend it. I think each one should judge in such a matter for himself. Everything that leads us nearer to God must do us good! The only question to be considered is, *does* it lead us nearer to God?"

The younger girl hesitates for a moment, and then says, in a low voice,—

"But if it relieves one's mind of the burden of sin, and makes one feel one's self to be forgiven, it must be a great comfort. Mr. Crosbie says that our sins (even the very worst) once whispered there, and absolved through his voice, are blotted out forever, here and hereafter, and that we need not even trouble ourselves to think of them any more."

"May, has Mr. Crosbie been trying to persuade you to go to confession to him?"

"Not more than he has others. He thinks we should all do it. His own wife goes regularly twice a week."

"Ah, his wife is his wife, and you are Lewis's. Those are two different things, and I don't think Lewis would approve of it, May, and I'm sure you would not go against his wishes and your mother's."

"Oh, no. Yet it must be a very comfortable feeling to receive absolution for everything you have ever done, and start clear again."

"Why, my dear girl," cries Anna, "you talk as if you were a hardened offender. What sins can you have to confess that all the world might not hear? Go and tell them to your husband, you silly child! He will be your best father-confessor and your readiest absolver."

May has grown scarlet at this remark, but she laughs it off, nevertheless.

"Fancy Lewis as a priest! Wouldn't he be a handsome one? All the girls would want to confess then. I should never get him out of the confessional."

Then her voice suddenly drops, and she says, *wearily*,—

"I am sorry you don't think confession a good thing. I thought it would be *such* a comfort!"

"May, dear, don't misunderstand me!" replies Anna.

"I believe there are times when confession would be invaluable, but I cannot imagine their occurring to *you*. It would be a terrible thing, for instance, to die with a sin upon one's soul. If a person has committed an offence, and hidden it from the world—lived the life of a hypocrite, deceiving his friends and acquaintances, and pretending to be pure and good, whilst all the time he knew himself to be wicked, and then died with that sin unconfessed, I think he would be doubly guilty. *That* is an extreme case in which the priest (who is God's servant) may well be called in and consulted as to what reparation may be made before it is too late. But I don't care for constant confession, nor do I believe that any absolution the priest may pronounce over us will not be bestowed as readily by God Himself in answer to our contrition."

Anna looks at her sister-in-law as she concludes, and is surprised to see how disturbed and nervous she appears.

"The subject excites you, dear," she adds quietly; "don't let us talk of it any more to-day."

Sunday has become quite a gala day for the Vangels, as Mr. and Mrs. Moriaty cannot consent to pass it without a sight of their dear May, and so the whole family is bound to dine and spend the afternoon and evening at the Manor House. May drives the old lady over in her pony chaise, but Lewis and Anna (who have been so long separated) prefer to walk and talk together.

"Now you will see my May in her true colors," exclaims Lewis. "She is so much the life and soul of the Manor House, that sometimes I feel quite guilty to have robbed them of her. She seems to become a child again when she crosses the threshold of her old home."

"Is she not always a child, Lewis?"

"Not always. At times she is grave—almost melancholy. I do not check such moods on her part. It is good for all of us occasionally to stop on the journey of life and think."

"For so young a husband, you are wonderfully practical."

"Am I? I try carefully to avoid the rhapsodies of passion when judging for her. I feel them, of course, but I do not encourage them. They are the effects of excitement, and life should be made up of something more substantial. May represents to me a huge responsibility. I love her too much for wisdom, but I try to put my feelings aside, and be wise. I want to treat her as a reasonable fellow-creature—not to think too much of her, or I shall be disappointed, and not too little, or she may never gain the highest standard of womanhood. I would place her by my side and let her walk there—not by my moral, but by my temporal, side. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do. Without attempting to put the same strain upon her mental or physical powers as on your own, you would give her an equal chance to win the race. You will handicap yourself, in fact, in order to make the burthen lighter for her."

"And to make myself more just when judging her," replies Lewis gently.

They started long before the occupants of the pony chaise, and have already gained the grounds of the Manor House.

"Did you ever see any gardens more perfect?" he continues, as they enter. "Flowers are Mrs. Moriarty's hobby, and they well repay her care. Ah! here is the pony chaise creeping after us. I believe May is half afraid of her new possession, for she never lets him go out of a walk; or perhaps it is mother who is doubtful of her skill as a whip. Well, here we are, you see, miles

before you," he continues, as the little basket chaise draws up beside them.

"Because you started *hours* before," pouts May.

"Not a bit of it. That pony of yours is all wrong. Got a spring halt or a sprain, or something. He couldn't go if he tried."

"Oh, can't he? I passed Mrs. Crosbie three times on the way to Eastweir last Wednesday."

"That was all your spite and the pony's. Come now, May, I'll race you up to the hall door."

"How disgraceful! On a Sunday, too! However, I'll take the challenge. What's it to be?"

"Gloves. Fourpenny cottons."

"Mean wretch! Stand out of my way, or I'll go over your toes. One—two—three—off!"

And away they rattle up the drive, Lewis running as fast as he can, and May whipping her pony into a gallop, whilst old Mrs. Vangel holds tight on, and screams at the rocking of the pony chaise. Anna laughs at the exuberance of their spirits, and hurries after them, arriving at the hall door in time to see Lewis hand his wife and mother from their little carriage.

"I won," are the first words she hears May saucily exclaim. "You were yards behind us, Lewis."

"What audacity. If I hadn't caught your rein, you would have been over your mother's flower-beds."

"Where do you expect to go to when you die? We never saw you in front of us once, did we, mother?"

"Your eyes must require attention, my dear. I shall take you to an oculist on the very first opportunity."

"You wait till I get within reach of your ears. You will require to go to an aurist yourself."

"Oh, Anna, my dear," says Mrs. Vangel, as she takes her daughter's arm to enter the house, "did you ever hear *two such children* in your life?"

"*They are very happy children,*" replies Anna, with a

smile. In the hall they are met by Mrs. Moriatty. She looks flurried and anxious, though she extends them a hearty welcome.

"My dear people," she exclaims, "I am so glad you are come, but Mr. Moriatty and I have been a little upset to-day."

"Nothing wrong, mamma, I hope?" says May.

"Oh, no, my darling! nothing *can* be wrong whilst you look so well and blooming. But papa and I have been taken by surprise this morning, and I do hate surprises of all sorts."

"What has surprised you, dear?"

"Well, it will surprise you too, May, and I don't know whether you will care about it. We have a visitor."

"*A visitor!*" May's flushed face becomes as pale as ashes, and her big blue eyes stare at her mother expectantly.

"Yes, your Aunt Kathleen. Now, don't worry about it, my darling, it can't be helped, and you needn't sit with her more than you feel inclined. But she came down upon us this morning quite unawares, and, of course, we had no alternative but to ask her to stay. I don't like what I have seen of her much, May," continues Mrs. Moriatty, in a confidential tone, "but we must put up with her for papa's sake."

The good mother is talking more rapidly than is her wont, to try and divert the general attention from May's white face, but every one has seen it, nevertheless, and Lewis draws near and takes his wife's hand in his own.

"Is—is—she *alone*?" asks May, with lips that have suddenly become dry.

"Oh, yes, dear! She *says* she has been staying with friends at Todhampton, and wished to take us by surprise (which she certainly did), but, somehow, I don't believe her story. However, come in and see her. She has been asking for you ever since her arrival, and I have

had some difficulty in preventing her going down to Wotton House. Come along, both of you. She professes to be as anxious to see Lewis as yourself. But she's terribly Irish," adds Mrs. Moriaty, "and if Dan hadn't said she was his own sister, I would never have believed it."

She precedes them into the hall, and Lewis feels May's fingers clutch nervously at his arm.

"Courage, my darling," he says, as he turns and kisses her, "you won't feel it half so much as you imagine. Lady O'More behaved very badly to you at the last. Don't let her think you have regretted the loss of her acquaintance."

"Oh, no, I won't," replies May, stimulated by his generous encouragement.

They all enter the drawing-room together.

"Here is my May and her husband, and my very dear friends, Mrs. and Miss Vangel," says Mrs. Moriaty, introducing the new arrivals. Lady O'More, looking as faded, and indolent, and untidy as ever, is lounging back in an arm-chair by the side of her brother, who appears very uncomfortable and constrained in her presence. He rises and embraces May, as his sister exclaims.—

"Ah! is that me dear Mary, now? Come and kiss me, me love! I've missed ye sadly since ye left us, and so has your Cousin Denis—though the poor boy has had much to distress him. And that's your husband? I'm pleased to meet him. Well, well! how the wur-ruld changes! I would have been sending ye a handsome wedding-present, me dears, but ye know well enough that it's not in me power to do so. And your cousin Denis's imprudent marriage has cost me more than I could well afford. Ah, me dear child, there was a mistake. *There* was a downfall to all me hopes! Well, it's no use talking of it now. You've got a very good-looking husband," continues Lady O'More, with an arch glance at Lewis that was considered to be very effective in her

younger days, "and you're looking remarkably well yourself. Our dear Mary does ye credit, sir. You've taken good care of her."

"I hope to do so always, Lady O'More," replies Lewis, as he turns away to speak to his father-in-law. Her ladyship motions May to a seat beside her.

"And are ye surprised to see me, now?" she asks.

"Very much surprised, Aunt Kathleen. So much so, that I could hardly believe mother was in earnest when she told me you were here," replies May, using her tongue for the first time, and pleased to find it easier than she expected. "The last thing we thought was that you would find your way down to our stupid little village."

"Ah, child, I am not the woman I was when ye visited me in London. The trouble, and the disappointment, and the expinse I have gone through since we parted is beyand telling. When I returned home I found a person waiting for me who said she was your Cousin Denis's wife. But perhaps your father has told ye, May?"

"Yes, yes; I have heard it. He deceived you all along," cries May, trembling with indignation.

"Ah! the poor boy. Ye mustn't be hard on him. He has repented bitterly of the mistake. But she won't leave him alone. She pursues him to my house. I am forced either to take her in or to turn him out. And they are both there now, and so I thought I would come down to Withyslea for a little rest. I felt sure me own brother Dan would be pleased to see me after so many years. And it is a sweet place, Mary. It must be charming in the summer."

"It is charming at all times. It is the sweetest place in all the world. My own dear home," says her niece enthusiastically.

"Ah! ye didn't think so always, me dear. Ye said it was a dull little hole when ye first saw the beauties of London and Paris."

"I know I did, Aunt Kathleen," replies May blushing, "but I am young and ignorant, and my eyes were dazzled by all the new things I saw. But, when I returned home, I felt how dear Withyslea is to me, and how ungrateful I was to have despised it, even for a moment."

"I told ye there was some one on the lookout for ye in Withyslea when ye were in such a hurry to get back again," laughs her aunt languidly, "but ye were sure it wasn't true. Ah! Mary, me dear, I was vexed with ye for leaving me, but 'twas just as well, perhaps, for me hopes for ye would never have been realized."

May, who has been painfully confused during the whole of the interview, here grows redder than before.

"No, indeed, Aunt Kathleen. It was all a mistake. Pray don't speak of it any more," she says hurriedly, and below her breath.

"Ah! no, of course not; but ye have some regard left, I hope, for your poor cousin, who did his best to amuse ye, Mary, whilst his own heart must have been very sore. Me poor Denis. He was a good cousin to ye, child, and I'm thinking if ye were to speak to your father about him, and persuade him to put him into some appointment or position of trust, that he wouldn't be refusing ye. Denis often speaks of ye, May, and says he would give an-ny-thing to see ye again, and how he is to support a wife (and maybe a family) I can't tell, for my means are growing less and less each year, and that's the truth of it."

"Aunt Kathleen," says May bravely, "you mustn't ask me to speak to papa about it. He would not listen to me. It is not my business. He is far more likely to grant such a favor to you."

"And do ye mean to tell me now," asks Lady O'More, holding her glasses to her eyes, "that that fine young man ye call your husband would be jealous of your interference on behalf of your Cousin Denis?"

"*Jealous!*" repeats May, with a crimson face. "Oh,

dear no! Why should he be jealous? It is papa who would think I was overstepping my privileges. You must ask him yourself, Aunt Kathleen."

And she glances across the room at her husband in an imploring manner, which Lewis interprets as a plea for assistance, and returns to her side.

"Your father has just been telling me, May, that he sent an order to Leaton yesterday for four beds and bedding, complete, for our hospital. Isn't it good of him? As soon as ever your curtains are ready, we will open in grand style."

"Me brother Dan had always a generous heart, Doctor Vangel," says Lady O'More. "He was remarkable for it from a boy. I'm wanting our dear Mary to plead with him on behalf of her Cousin Denis, who is his nearest of kin after her, but she feels bashful about it, and I'm thinking it's yourself she's more afraid of than her good father."

"May afraid of *me*?" replies Lewis, with an incredulous smile.

"She's thinking, maybe, ye wouldn't like her to appear to take so much interest in her cousin, but, sure, you're good-looking enough to hold your own, and not be jealous of any one."

"Oh! Aunt Kathleen, don't talk such nonsense," cries May petulantly. "We don't understand such things in Withyslea (at least Lewis and I don't) and the reason I refuse to ask papa to help Cousin Denis is because I think he had no business to marry a wife until he could support her."

She rises as she speaks, and links her arm within that of her husband.

"Oh, dear!" exclaims Lady O'More affectedly, "I had no intention at all to raise such a storm. I thought maybe ye would wish to return your cousin's kindnesses to ye. But don't think twice about it, *me* dear. I'll speak to *me* brother *meself*."

"What a roaring fire mamma has got! The room is intolerably warm," says May, turning her flushed face to her husband. "Let us go into the conservatory, Lewis, for a few minutes before dinner."

He leads her tenderly away, and when they are out of sight and hearing of the occupants of the drawing-room, she lays her head upon his shoulder, and sheds a few quiet tears.

"My poor girl!" says Lewis, "this meeting is rather a trial for you. It revives the past, and the shadow of your disappointment returns. But only the shadow, dear May! Be brave, and it will soon pass. And I am with you, remember, ready to support and comfort you."

"Oh, Lewis, how good you are to me! Most men would be so angry and so jealous. You are more like a friend to me than a husband."

"Am I to take that as a compliment, love, or not?" replies Lewis, laughing. "'More your friend than your husband.' Well, I hope so, for that is what I wish to be. Your friend first, before all other things, and your husband when it doesn't interfere with being your friend."

"You help me so much! I feel brave enough for anything when you are by me."

"That is just as it should be. Do you think I can't enter into your present feelings, May? Indeed, I do. You see Lady O'More and her son now with clear eyes, and you are ashamed to remember what they looked like to you before."

"I think she is *detestable*," says May energetically.

"So do I, dear, and so do Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty, if I am not much mistaken. But, cheer up; they can never get on together. She will not be here long."

"Do you—do you think—there is any chance of *his* following his mother here?" asks May, with a shudder, *as she hides* her face in Lewis's waistcoat.

He stoops and kisses the fair crown lying on his breast.

It is a solemn kiss of protection, such as a father might give to a clinging child, a brother to a frightened sister.

"I don't know, darling, and I don't care. It will make no difference to you, anyway. If you don't wish to see him, you shall not, if I lock you up in a room, and stand sentinel before the door myself until he has turned his back on Withyslea."

"But if he insisted upon seeing me? It would look so strange of me to refuse."

"Then I would meet him face to face, and tell him the true reason—that you are my wife, and I have sworn to protect you from such as he."

"Oh, no, no, Lewis. You must not meet him. You might quarrel. It would frighten me," cries May, in a voice of alarm.

"Come, my darling! I can't have any more of this," remonstrates her husband with mild authority. "You are terrifying yourself for a chimera. Mr. O'More is not here, and I should not imagine that he is likely to come. So dry your eyes, and don't distress your dear, good parents by a sight of your tears. If you don't feel well, I'll take you home. But if you remain to dinner, don't let your aunt (whom I should take to be rather a scandalous old lady) run away with the notion that I don't make you happy."

"Oh, Lewis, what an idea! *You*, who are the best and dearest in all the world to me."

"Well, darling, no one would think it, to see your red eyes. But here comes your mother."

"Why, what's the matter?" exclaims Mrs. Moriatty, "is May ill?"

"No, Mrs. Moriatty, nothing of the sort. But your room was rather too warm for her, and Lady O'More has been worrying her about her son till she grew quite nervous."

"Oh, my dear, what an awful woman. I don't wonder at her worrying any one. She drives me wild," replies Mrs. Moriatty.

"Mother, is she going to stay long?" asks May.

"I hope not, my darling, but I can't say. I suppose we shall have to endure her till she chooses to go. But I expect papa will find some excuse to shake her off in a few days. If I had known what a frivolous, silly woman she was, I would never have let you stay with her."

May heaves a deep sigh.

"Why, regret that now?" says Lewis cheerfully. "It is over, and need never be renewed. Is dinner ready, good mother, for I'm desperately hungry, and it will do May all the good in the world. Come, my blessing."

She draws him backward.

"Am I *really* your blessing?" she says eagerly.

"Can you doubt it? The greatest blessing I have ever had."

"When I am so unworthy, Lewis."

"I don't consider you unworthy, darling. What of? My love? Then I must be unworthy of yours. And yet we love each other. Is not the whole question summed up in that? Come along to dinner, and don't talk any more nonsense."

"But kiss me first, Lewis."

He holds out his arms to her, and their lips and hearts meet in a simultaneous embrace.

"*My friend*," May whispers, "my friend, and my husband, and my lover."

"Hullo, young people!" exclaims Mrs. Moriaty, looking back, "is this what you call coming to dinner?" and then they all join in a hearty laugh, and the shadow is chased into a corner.

The rest of the day passes much as usual, yet the Vangels are glad to return to Wotton House. The presence of Lady O'More has cast a restraint over the family. She is so silly, and inquisitive, and complaining, and she talks so *incessantly*, that no one has felt at their ease before her, and especially May and Lewis. So, as early as they de-

cently can, they make an excuse to hurry homewards. Anna Vangel thinks that the bright fire in her mother's sitting-room looks particularly inviting as she returns to it, for she has felt less at home at the Manor House than the others. She has thrown off her mantle and bonnet, and has settled herself down for an hour's quiet reading, when Mrs. Vangel announces her determination to go to bed.

"What! So soon, mother? It is only nine o'clock."

"My dear Anna, I feel tired to death, and Lady O'More's chatter has given me quite a headache. I positively cannot sit up any longer. You join your brother and sister."

"Oh, I won't disturb them to-night. They will probably enjoy a little time to themselves. I will sit here and read till I am ready to retire."

"Very well, my dear. Good-night."

Anna had sat in the well-lighted, and well-warmed room for perhaps half an hour, when May thrusts her head in at the door.

"Anna, are you all alone?"

"Yes, dear. Mother is tired, and has gone to bed."

"May I come and sit with you for a little while?"

"Why, what a question! I shall only be too pleased to have you. Where is Lewis?"

"Oh, he has been obliged to go out. Didn't you hear him leave? A man came for him to attend a midwifery case. He may not be home till morning. It is so tiresome that babies will always arrive in the middle of the night."

"Yes, they have a knack of doing so. But come near the fire, May. You will catch cold in that draught."

May advances to the centre of the room. She has changed her visiting dress for a loose robe of cashmere, and her fair hair is hanging down her back.

"I was just making myself comfortable," she says, laughing, "when the night-bell rang, and Lewis had to

go. And it made me feel so lonely, I thought I must come to you."

"Second best to Lewis," said Anna, smiling.

"Yes, that is just what I feel you could be to me if you choose, Anna; you are like him in so many things. Not quite so nice, you know, but very nearly," replies May saucily.

"Thanks dear. I acknowledge the compliment as a very great one at your hands, for I know that you think Lewis nearly perfection."

"I do," returns May. "I didn't think so before we were married, but since we have lived together, I can't see one fault in him. He is never angry, nor impatient, nor unkind in any way, and he is so unselfish that he would go without every comfort if some one else did not think of them for him. And he is so truthful, and generous, and—"

"And his wife loves him so dearly," interrupts Anna, as she looks up into May's face.

The girl grows suddenly scarlet.

"And his wife loves him so dearly," she echoes, with a tremulous laugh.

Then she throws herself on the rug at her sister-in-law's feet, and, resting her arms upon Anna's knees, she looks upwards, and exclaims,—

"Tell me all you can remember about him, Anna, since he was a little boy."

CHAPTER XXI.

MIDNIGHT SHADOWS.

"ALL I can remember about Lewis since he was a little boy!" repeats Anna, with amazement. "Do you want to listen to a three-volume novel, May? Do you know that, until he came to Withyslea, Lewis and I had hardly ever been parted?"

"Then you will have all the more to tell me. I long to hear it, Anna. I should like to know everything he has done and said since he was born."

"I think, if you *could* hear it, that you would find it was as stainless a record as ever was written of a man's life. I am very proud of my brother, May. I know he must have his faults like other men. He has, for example, a quick temper."

"A quick temper! Oh, no, Anna, surely not. I have never heard him say a hasty word."

"I daresay not, but that is because he has acquired so much self-control. But he feels it all the same, and when he was a child he was very passionate."

"Wasn't he a dear, sweet child, and very pretty, Anna?"

"No, I don't think so, but he was always very thoughtful. Our father was a rich man at one time, May, and we lived in a beautiful country-house in Devonshire, surrounded by a park; and when my brother was a boy, he used to be lost in this park sometimes for hours. I was a strong, healthy, romping girl, ready to join him in bird-nesting or rabbit-hunting, or any other sport. But he preferred his own company. He would give me the slip, and go off by himself, and when he returned my mother would find he had been wandering half over the county."

When we questioned him as to what he had been doing, he used to say he had been 'thinking.' And I believe it is this early habit of thinking that has made him what he is."

"But didn't he like manly things?" asks May, in a disappointed tone. "I am surprised at that, for papa thinks he is one of the best horsemen he knows, and he says, if he will subscribe to the Todhampton hounds, he will give him a hunter next season."

"I expect Lewis will find hunting interfere with his duties, and will be afraid of getting too much engrossed by it. Yes, May, he loved manly sports of all kinds, and the bitterest part of our reverse of fortune to him was having to give up his horses and hunting and shooting. He is a first-rate shot."

"He never speaks of those things to me, Anna."

"It is best he should not, dear. They are past and gone, with his prospects of independence, and Lewis is not one to cry over spilt milk. Of course, he naturally thought that Denne Park would eventually be his. He was educated for the medical profession, because my father thought it as useful an one as any, but he never expected him to follow it for a livelihood. However, as it happens, it was most fortunate he did so, or he would have been worse off than he is. My father had accumulated a large fortune in commerce, and might well have been content to rest there. But when are rich men content, May? Very seldom. The more they have (particularly if they have made it themselves) the more they want. We had everything our hearts could desire, but my father thought he saw a way to double his savings. Had he done so, he would have been a millionaire. As it was, he lost everything, and reduced us to pauperism. It was not mere poverty, it was pauperism. The loss was so overwhelming, that everything had to go to the hammer. The shock killed my father. He had three strokes

of paralysis, one after the other, and the third carried him off."

"Oh, Anna, how terrible. Lewis has told me a little, but not half so much as this. And he has borne it all so well."

"He bore it like a hero, May. I never was so proud of my brother. The dreamy, thoughtful boy, that we had thought good for little beside writing verses and playing on the piano, proved to be a far stouter-hearted man than his father. He saw the necessity for action at a glance, and became the staff and stay of my mother and myself from that moment. He studied night and day till he had passed his final examinations and procured this appointment, and then he wanted to take the burthen of both of us on his own hands. But I wouldn't hear of it. Besides, I have an independent spirit, and don't care to place myself under an obligation to any one. Lewis feels like me in this particular, and I think the greatest proof of his love for you lies in the fact that he has consented to receive so many favors at your father's hands."

"Oh, papa regards him as a son, and loves him only next best to myself. But, Anna, you have told me nothing of him as a little boy."

"What is there to tell, dearest? The struggles of the last few years seem to have driven the memory of my childhood's days out of my head. I can remember one very characteristic anecdote of Lewis, however. When he was about ten years old, a neighbor's son of the name of Darley used to come in very often to play with us. Darley was a rude boy, about two years Lewis's senior, and very rough. One day, when we were all three playing in the library, he knocked over a large dark blue china vase that stood on a black marble pedestal, and smashed it to atoms. We were all dismayed. The vase was a very valuable one, and much prized by my father."

"*'What shall we do?'* said Darley."

" 'We must tell the truth,' replied Lewis.

" 'Rubbish,' said the elder boy, 'your father will flay us alive, and my father won't be behindhand if he hears of it. Let us bring Sultan in here, and shut all the doors, and then they'll think he did it.'

"Sultan was a large Newfoundland dog, who was generally kept loose about the grounds.

"The boys argued the matter for some time, Lewis closing his lips and wrinkling his brow in the manner he does to this day when he means to be firm, and sticking to his resolution like a man. At last Darley said,—

" 'Well, all I say is, if you split on me, I'll pound you into jelly, and that's the long and the short of it.'

"Then he went home. I looked at Lewis; I was only seven, and very frightened, and whispered,—

" 'Lewis, what will you do?'

" 'Nothing, till father questions me.'

" 'And then——?'

" 'I must tell the truth, what else can I do? You wouldn't have me tell a *lie*?' he answered, and I shall never forget the scorn and contempt he threw into the word. Of course the questioning came soon enough; we were both sent for, and went into my father's presence, hand in hand.

" 'Lewis, did you break that vase?' he commenced.

" 'No father.'

" 'Did Anna do it?'

" 'No father.'

" 'Did you see it done?'

"Lewis's breast heaved as he replied, with an effort,—

" 'Yes, father.'

" 'Who did it then?'

" 'I looked at my brother; his face was very red, and the tears were twinkling in his eyes. I think my father *half suspected* he was lying to him.

" 'Who did it? tell me at once,' he repeated.

"'Father,' said Lewis, 'please don't ask me; think it was me if you like, and give me any punishment you choose, but don't make me a sneak.'

"'That's all nonsense,' replied my father wrathfully. 'I'm not going to have valuable property destroyed in this way without finding out the delinquent. If you saw it broken, you must tell me who did it, or I shall conclude it was yourself, and punish you accordingly.'

"But this threat was too much for me; I cried out,—

"'It *wasn't* Lewis; it was Tom Darley, for I saw him.'

"'Oh, Anna,' said Lewis reproachfully.

"'Is this true?' demanded my father.

"'Yes,' replied Lewis, in a low voice; 'but he was our guest, father, so we can't visit it upon him.'

"However, I suppose my father had no such scruples, for the matter was repeated to Mr. Darley, and, a few days after, the ruffian Tom waylaid poor little Lewis in the park, and did his best to fulfil his threat and beat him to a jelly; he pummelled the poor child's head and face till it was swollen, and bruised, and bleeding, and when he returned home he got a second punishment for having been so naughty as to fight. I remember, when I crept up to the bedroom where he had been summarily dismissed, and found him lying face downward on his pillow trying to hide the tears he was ashamed to shed, all he said to me was, 'Never mind, Anna, it doesn't hurt much, and I didn't tell a lie.'"

"He must have been a brave boy," says May, with glowing eyes.

"He always was brave as a little lion, and upright as the day. Truth has been the keynote of his life, May. I do not believe Lewis would tell a lie to save his soul, nor act one either."

"*Nor act one ?*" repeats May interrogatively.

"No; he would have as great a horror of one deed as of the other. A man who professes to be saintly because

it helps him on in his profession, a woman who pretends to be shocked at her neighbor's failings in order to cover her own, such people are abominations to Lewis, and worse in his eyes (I have often heard him say so) than open offenders."

"He is very strict," says May quietly.

"Not more than he should be, dear. A little laxity in truth is apt to lead to a great deal. I have never known my brother to be so hard upon anything as a want of honesty. He thinks it so contemptible—so cowardly—so mean. I believe he would part with his dearest friend if he found he had deceived him."

May is gazing up into her face with wide-open, startled eyes.

"Oh, Anna, you must be mistaken. He could not have the heart. He is so kind."

"Indeed, May, I am not mistaken. I am quite sure that Lewis would act as I say. However much he had regarded such a friend in the past, he would feel he was no longer worthy of his friendship, and tear him from his heart by force. It would be such a shock to him, he would never get over it. Lewis is just that sort of man. Where he loves, he believes entirely, without doubt or scruple. I think that must be because he is so true himself. But, were he once convinced he had been wilfully deceived, he would believe nothing that that person could say to him afterwards. All his trust would be gone, and, where he had been soft and indulgent, he would become hard as a rock. I remember a servant whom we had once——"

"Oh, stop, Anna, stop," cries May, in a voice of sudden pain. "Don't tell me any more. You frighten me."

Anna Vangel turns to her with a look of the tenderest concern.

"*I frighten you, May? Why, my dear girl, what is this? You are trembling like a leaf. What have I said to cause such fear?*"

"Nothing, nothing. I am very silly. Only you have drawn such a picture of perfection, I begin to fear I shall never attain to it. I am full of faults, Anna! I have often told fibs to screen myself or get out of a scrape, and now (by your account) Lewis would never forgive me if he found them out."

"Oh, my dear, you are quite right to call yourself foolish. You cannot suppose I was alluding to such trifles as those. I don't mean to say they are right, May. I am sure it is best to stick religiously to the truth in everything, but I was talking of more serious matters. Little fibs may deteriorate from the solid worth of your character, but a deception that affects one's whole life—that turns one into a hypocrite to the world, passing for that which one is *not—that* is the sort of falsehood that blasts love and destroys friendship, by undermining all faith and trust."

"Yes, yes, I understand," replies May Vangel, in a faint, vague voice.

"May, my dear, you are very tired. Had you not better go to bed?" demands Anna, with some concern.

"Go to bed!" she exclaims, suddenly rousing herself, and springing to her feet. "Why, we haven't had any supper yet. It is all ready laid for us in the dining-room. Come along, Anna; it is useless waiting for our immaculate Lewis. He may not be home to-night, and I ate so little dinner to-day that I am as hungry as I can be."

She rings the bell smartly as she speaks, and the parlor-maid appears to attend them to the dining-room.

"What will you take, Anna?" asks May gayly, as they sit down together, "cold chicken—cold ham—cold beef? Is there not anything hot, Maria? Oh, I suppose cook thought we might take supper at the Manor House. Hand me the salad. And give me a glass of wine, quick. I am shivering with the cold."

"What wine will you take, ma'am?"

"Any sort; it doesn't signify. Port, if you have it open. Anna, you are not eating anything. Do make a good supper, and keep me in countenance."

Anna is not eating, simply because all her attention is rivetted on the change in her sister-in-law's demeanor. She is at a loss to understand this sudden vivacity. Ten minutes ago May was almost in tears; now she is beaming with smiles, and chattering like a magpie. Anna Vangel has not had much experience of the variable moods of young girls. She has rarely associated with them at all, and never intimately; and this girl appears to be rather a contradiction in her eyes, which she is quick to attribute to her own ignorance. However, May rattles on during the rest of the meal, apparently determined that no one shall think she is low-spirited—laughing hysterically, indeed, at some silly anecdotes she introduces of the Newhams and the Taylors, and altogether astonishing her sober-minded sister-in-law. As they rise from table, Anna says she must really go to bed.

"I am more tired to-night than I was yesterday, May, and can hardly keep my eyes open. Good-night." And she hurries upstairs, rather glad to get away before May shall make herself more ridiculous in the eyes of the parlor-maid. Mrs. Lewis Vangel follows her—springing up the stairs, three at a time—chasing a benighted cat all down the corridor—and finally running into her bedroom and shutting the door with a bang. And then, as soon as it is locked behind her, and she knows that she is safe from supervision, poor May throws herself, just as she is, upon the bed, and bursts into a violent fit of weeping.

Meanwhile, Lewis, having been obliged to leave his Sunday fireside at the call of duty, trudges along the hard, frosty road, to watch the advent of another wailing little mortal to increase the load of sin and suffering which *already weighs down* this earth to the very ground.

The case is a difficult one, and as soon as he enters the

cottage (which is more than a mile from his home) he sees he will be detained there for the best part of the night. His patient is neither healthy nor young, and he is rather doubtful how the case may terminate. But had she been a duchess expecting the heir to her husband's titles and honors, she could not have been treated with more tenderness or consideration.

It is under circumstances like these that Lewis Vangel's true character manifests itself. All the natural impatience and disgust of a young man at being deprived of his rest, and stationed for hours in a dirty cottage, doing nothing but wait and watch, are laid aside in sight of a suffering fellow-creature; and he takes as much trouble to try and mitigate the pain of this middle-aged laborer's wife as if she were the highest lady in the land, and able to bestow a baronetcy on him for his attention. Some people may affect to see nothing grand in such conduct, and say that the village doctor only performed his duty in giving all his time and talent for the benefit of his patients. But how many medical men do their duty in such particulars? How many who will watch beside a lady's bed for hours in anticipation of the husband slipping a check for ten pounds into their hands as soon as the event is over, will walk into a poor woman's cottage, and sit down in the lower room the whole time, unless any complication should arise that requires their immediate supervision, and swear at the nurse for having sent for them half an hour too soon? If my readers have not seen it, I have. I have known cases where the doctor refused to stir out at all, because the fee had not been sent by the messenger who summoned him. Consideration, and tenderness, and sympathy are to be bought with gold from some people, as well as skill, and activity, and promptitude, but not from Lewis Vangel. He will ride as quickly to visit the poor as the rich; perhaps even more so, because *he knows they can command no assistance but his own.*

On the present occasion he sits for many hours, silent and watchful—unable to do any good, but loath to go out of calling. He wiles away the dreary time, thinking of his bonnie May, and how happy he is with her, and how happy he hopes she is with him ; whilst May lies sobbing on her bed, and wishing, in the idle fashion of women, that she were dead. At last, when the night is far advanced, a miserable little mortal is ushered, only half alive, into the world, and the mother is so far safe. As soon as he is able to leave her and examine the infant, Lewis goes downstairs to consult with the father of the family.

“Your wife is all right, Burrows, I am glad to say, and likely to do well ; but I’m afraid you won’t save the infant. It is very weakly and exhausted in the birth.”

Burrows, who has seven other children of different ages packed away in the house, does not seem to regard the news as a calamity.

“Well, sir, it’s the Lord’s will, and it can’t be helped. If the old woman gets about agen, it’s all I care for. I know, if anybody could save the youngster, you would.”

“Of course, Burrows, but I don’t think it will be here very long. You had better have it baptized at once.”

Burrows becomes frightened. The poor are even more particular about baptism than the rich. To lie in a piece of unconsecrated ground is tantamount with them to going into the Union. He opens his mouth with terror at certain remembrance.

“Bless your ’art, doctor, what shall I do? Mr. Jackson our minister’s away on a tour of missionary work till next Sunday, and Mr. Crosbie won’t so much as look at me in passing since I’ve attended the Methodist chapel. I wouldn’t dare go nigh the Vicarage, sir, far less presume to call him up at this time o’ night.”

“That’s foolish, Burrows. This is an exceptional case, and Mr. Crosbie wouldn’t dare (Mr. Jackson being away)

to refuse to baptize a dying child. It would be unheard of."

Burrows scratches his head uneasily.

"Well, I wouldn't like to go alone, doctor, and that's a fact, and I suppose it would be presuming too far on your kindness to ask you to come along with me?"

"No, it would not, but it would be foolish for us both to go. There's only a woman with your wife, and assistance of some sort might be needed. You stay here, Burrows, and I'll go as fast as I can to the Vicarage and summon Mr. Crosbie. There is no time to be lost, I assure you. The poor little creature is only just breathing."

And hurriedly assuming his greatcoat and hat, Lewis Vangel leaves the cottage, and begins to run towards the Vicarage. He hardly thinks the baby will live to receive the ordinance of baptism. He considers, as he goes, the readiest way by which he will be able to rouse Mr. Crosbie, who sleeps at the back of the house. He concludes to enter the garden in front, and go round by the side and ring the kitchen bell, which is near the servant's sleeping apartments, at the same time that he throws some gravel up at the Vicar's bedroom window.

But as he gains the back of the Vicarage, he is surprised to see a light gleaming through one of the lower casements. Shutters are unknown in Withyslea, but the white blind is down, and on it the streak of light has thrown two shadows, which are as plainly visible as if they had been photographs.

"The Vicar has some extra work to do," thinks Lewis to himself, "and the fair Charlotte is sitting up to keep him company. Well, if he shared my taste, he would rather be alone."

As the thought flashes through his mind like a flash of lightning, he smiles broadly. The two figures have embraced each other, and sunk down on the sofa, with their arms and hands entwined.

"Hindering the poor man's studies," thinks Lewis. "What a shame. But I didn't believe the dear creature had half so much energy in her. However, luckily, I shall have no difficulty in making them hear," and he knocks on the back door lustily with his bare knuckles.

He sees the two figures on the blind start quickly asunder, and some one raises a tiny portion of the curtain and peeps out.

"It is I, Mrs. Crosbie," calls Lewis loudly. "I have come to summon the Vicar. Please open the door," and he thumps at it again.

After a little hesitation, the bolts are withdrawn, and the door is opened just wide enough to permit him to see a portion of Mrs. Crosbie's face.

Is it you, Doctor Vangel, and the back door? How very strange!"

"Not at all. Mr. Crosbie is required to baptize a dying child. There is no time to be lost. Please ask him to come at once."

"If you will go round to the front door, Doctor Vangel, I will come and speak to you there," says Mrs. Crosbie, trying to close the portals. But Lewis is standing with his foot on the threshold.

"I cannot spare the time, Mrs. Crosbie. Let me see the Vicar. I know he is in the study, for I saw his shadow on the blind."

"That is impossible. You must be mistaken, for he is not at home. Mr. Crosbie was called away to Eastweir this afternoon, and will not return till to-morrow."

For one moment Lewis is staggered, the next he has determined to show this woman no consideration. He steps into the passage with a sudden effort before she can prevent him, and stands beside her.

"Then I must see Mr. Somerset. You must rouse him *at once*, if you please. This is a matter of life and death."

He speaks loudly and determinately, and Mrs. Crosbie

looks terribly frightened and undecided. Her voice shakes as she replies,—

“I have no doubt Mr. Somerset will go in place of the Vicar; indeed—”

What excuse she was going to make is frustrated by the appearance of the long-legged curate, who issues from the room where they have been sitting together.

“If any one requires me, Doctor Vangel, of course I will go,” he says, in a constrained voice. “It is fortunate that Mrs. Crosbie and I have so much work to finish for ‘The Girls’ Guild of a Good Life,’ that we were compelled to sit up rather later than usual in order to accomplish it.”

“Very fortunate,” replies Lewis dryly, as he looks at his watch. “It now wants a quarter to two. I am afraid Mrs. Crosbie’s health will suffer if she insists upon performing her duty at the expense of her natural rest.”

“No one has ever been able to accuse *me* of leaving the things undone which I ought to have done, Doctor Vangel,” exclaims Mrs. Crosbie quickly.

“Perhaps not. But, Mr. Somerset, I must trouble you to come at once. How fortunate it is that I came round to the back and saw your shadows on the blind, or I might have stood ringing at the front door bell for half-an-hour before you heard me.”

The curate huddles on a broad-brimmed hat and a huge comforter, and turns out without further parley on the gravel-path.

“Good-night, Mrs. Crosbie,” says Lewis, “I sincerely advise you to go to bed now, and leave ‘The Girls’ Guild of a Good Life’ till a more convenient opportunity.”

The only answer she vouchsafes him is to shut the door in his face, and the two men turn away and walk smartly down the road together. The curate seems very uncomfortable. He preserves a strict silence, but keeps glancing down at Lewis Vangel, as if he waited for him to *speak first*.

"You don't ask me where we are going?" says the young doctor presently.

"Oh, oh, of course!" replies Mr. Somerset. "Is it a child or an adult person?"

"A new-born child. May be dead by the time we get there. You know Bob Burrows's cottage by the limekiln?"

"*Burrows!*" exclaims the curate, stopping short; "is he not a dissenter from the Church?"

"I believe so. But the dissenting minister is absent until Sunday."

"Doctor Vangel, it is useless my going any further. I can no more baptize a dissenter's child than I could bury it. Either would be an insult to the Church."

"And for what reason?"

"You must know without my telling you. Because its parents do not subscribe to the tenets of the Church, nor submit themselves to her ordinances."

Lewis turns upon the Reverend Charles Somerset in a fury. The passionate temper of which Anna spoke is righteously in the ascendant now.

"And how do *you* submit yourself to Her ordinances, or obey Her laws, Mr. Somerset?"

The curate looks aghast.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I watched the shadows of yourself and Mrs. Crosbie on the blind before I knocked at the Vicarage door. I mean that you are a hypocritical scoundrel, not fit to take an innocent infant in your arms and profess to make it a Christian, but that, if you don't come on with me and do your duty, I'll wait upon the Vicar as soon as he returns to Withyslea, and tell him what I saw. That is what I mean."

"But you are insulting me. You cannot remember who and what I am, Doctor Vangel, or you would not *dare to asperse* my character, or that of a most blameless lady in this way."

"I know what you are well enough—no better than any other man, and rather worse than some. But come with me now, or we'll argue the matter in a way you may not like."

Mr. Somerset appears to think it better to drop the subject for the time being, and they reach Burrows's cottage together. The baby is still breathing, and the sacred words of baptism are said over it effectually. Lewis sees that his patient is going on well, and takes leave of her till the following morning. The curate and the doctor walk out into the night air again together. The Reverend Charles is in a very meditative mood. He strides on in silence, with his eyes fixed upon the ground. Lewis Vangel also appears disinclined for further conversation, and, as he reaches the gate of his own house, he wishes his companion a curt "good-night," and is about to pass in.

"Stay one moment, Doctor Vangel," says the curate hesitatingly. "I have a word to say to you. I suppose you can scarcely have been in earnest when you threatened just now to inform the Vicar of what you *imagined* you saw to-night. It is entirely your fancy. There is nothing to tell him, for nothing occurred but of which he would entirely approve."

"Then you have nothing to fear," replies Lewis indifferently.

"Certainly not, Doctor Vangel, but a lady's reputation is a delicate thing. The least breath of scandal, however untrue, may injure it forever. The Vicar has implicit faith in his wife, as, indeed, he may have, for a nobler, purer soul——"

"Yes, yes," responds Lewis, interrupting him, "I think I have heard that before, but blinds are awkward things when the light is behind them. Good-night!" and he walks up to his hall door, leaving the curate to return home in a state of great perplexity and alarm.

Lewis cannot help having an inward chuckle as he goes upstairs. He has gained a legitimate victory over the Vicar's wife, and, thenceforth, she will be at his mercy. He is too kind and too honorable to repeat what he has inadvertently seen to any one, but he knows that neither Mrs. Crosbie nor Mr. Somerset will credit him with the forbearance he intends to exercise, and, as he drops off to sleep after his night's work, he chuckles anew as he pictures their mutual dismay and forebodings of the evil to come.

CHAPTER XXII.

DENIS O'MORE.

As her month's holiday waxes and wanes, Anna Vangel becomes a little disappointed in her sister-in-law. She had hoped for such great results from their first introduction. She had dreamt of winning May's complete confidence, of hearing her, by degrees, unfold all her innocent, girlish thoughts, and of directing them, perhaps, into higher and more serious channels—of standing to her, in fact, in the position of an elder sister and friend. But that conversation held upon the Sunday evening seems to have frightened May, who studiously avoids renewing the subject. She is very sweet and affectionate in her demeanor, and always ready to include Anna in any scheme of pleasure or amusement, but she will not be left alone with her more than she can possibly avoid. She does not shun her society, but she never seeks it, as Anna hoped, at first, she would grow to do, and her spirits become very variable. Sometimes she will laugh and talk for hours together, and then, suddenly, *her mirth* will cease, and she will wander about the garden by herself, or set off on an unpremeditated visit to the

poor, or take a book and become lost in its contents for hours together—charming from her own point of view, perhaps, but unsociable when one has a visitor in the house.

The pleasure of going to the Manor House is very much lessened for them all at this period by the fact of the presence of Lady O'More. Lewis (knowing what he does) naturally avoids her. He is too much afraid of being tempted some day to say what he thinks of the manner in which she treated her niece. For Anna and Mrs. Vangel she possesses no interest, and May has an unconfessed but secret dread of her aunt. She never knows what she may say, nor what allusions she may make, before her father and mother, and the mere fact of knowing she is located under their roof, and liable to call at Wotton House at any moment, excites and worries her to an abnormal degree. Lewis Vangel watches very tenderly over his young wife at this crisis. He divines her feelings, and does all in his power to soothe and allay them without ever touching up the old wound by alluding to it. May recognizes his sympathy, and is grateful for it, but it is unequal to quell the irritable condition in which she finds herself, and which seems (curiously enough) to increase in her husband's presence, though she is never happy out of it. And yet, even Lewis cannot always understand her. On a certain occasion he meets her, after a few hours' absence, in the hall, and proceeds, in a very lover-like fashion, to fold her in his arms. May appears all eagerness, for a moment to yield herself to his caresses, when suddenly some memory seems to overwhelm her, and she disengages herself from his embrace.

"Why, what now, sweetheart?" he says laughingly.
"Any one watching us?"

"No, Lewis."

"Come along, then, into the drawing-room," playfully

pretending to drag her by the arm, "and give an account of all you've been doing during my absence."

But May hangs back.

"Don't drag me, Lewis. I'll come if you wish it, but I don't feel like romping."

"Are you tired, my dear?"

"No."

"Lazy, then?"

"Well, yes; perhaps lazy, for I certainly don't feel inclined to rush about. How are the Harrisons getting on, Lewis?"

"Pretty well. But don't let us talk of my cases just now. I have enough sadness to encounter during my rounds, May, and want my wife to talk to and laugh with me when I come home, to help me to shake it off;" and all the answer May gives him is a sigh, though she takes half its sting away by kissing him.

In the privacy of old Mrs. Vangel's room, Anna mentions the subject to her mother.

"Don't you see a great change in May lately?" she asks her. "She appears to me to be so much more languid and heavy-eyed than when I first came here."

Mrs. Vangel nods her head.

"Yes, my dear. I *have* seen it."

"What can be the reason, mother? She was so bright a few weeks ago. Can there be any—any little misunderstanding between her and Lewis?"

"Not a bit of it. The dear girl adores him."

"But I saw her push him away yesterday when he tried to put his arm round her waist. It seemed so strange. And Lewis only laughed. He appeared to regard it as a joke, whilst I thought May was needlessly cross with him."

"Ah, Lewis is cleverer than you are, my dear, and *sees further*. I have observed the alteration in his wife *as well as yourself*, but no doubt it will be all naturally

accounted for by-and-by," says Mrs. Vangel oracularly.

Then Anna sees her mother's drift, and smiles.

"Oh, mother, you are very premature. I don't think either Lewis or May have ever thought of such a thing. And surely, if they had, it would be an occasion for renewed tenderness between them, instead of repulsion and rebuff."

"I am not so sure of that, my dear. Young wives become very irritable and perverse at times, and are best left entirely to themselves. I would not say a word to May about the change in her behavior if I were you. Treat it as a matter of course."

"I have done so, mother, but I am sorry it should have happened during my visit. I must return to London next week, and we seem to have made so little progress in our acquaintance. Perhaps I expected too much from her, or perhaps May is disappointed in me, but I have always looked forward to being a dear friend to Lewis's wife."

"And so you are, my dear. I am sure May esteems you highly, and it will all come right in the end, take my word for it," and Mrs. Vangel, who will not be shaken in her own belief, nods her head, like an old Chinese mandarin, over her knitting, and dreams of the time when she shall see her grandchildren clustering about her knee.

Mrs. Moriaty (on the contrary) does not perceive any change in her daughter. She calls at Wotton House unusually often during this period of probation, and none of her friends ever remember to have seen her so annoyed as she is over the presence of Lady O'More under her own roof. She is too good-hearted openly to reprobate a visit from her husband's sister, but she looks weary and worried, and sighs for the moment when she and her Dan shall be once more at liberty. But Aunt Kathleen makes no sign of moving. One day Mrs. Moriaty comes over hastily with the news that they really think she is going, *because she has sent her travelling trunk to have a new*

strap put on, but the next morning she repeats, with a sigh, that Lady O'More has declared the man may take his time about returning her trunk, as she is in no hurry for it.

"And your poor papa," adds Mrs. Moriatty, "is quite in despair. Lady O'More won't even let him take his usual nap in the afternoon. I am sure, if she doesn't leave Withyslea soon, that he'll be quite ill. She is always arguing with him about having married me without making it a condition that I should become a Roman Catholic, and about not going to his own church, and about your being brought up a Protestant, till the poor man is sick of her. And I'm sure she can't be very particular herself, for I've offered her the carriage each Sunday to drive over to the Catholic chapel in Leaton, and she has made some paltry excuse for not going."

"I never saw her go to church the whole time I was with her," interposes May, "though in Paris I did—I did—"

"What did you do in Paris?" asks Anna.

"I was going to say," replies May, flushing to the roots of her hair, "that, when I was in Paris, I *did* see Notre Dame and the Madeleine."

"Her religion is all humbug," continues Mrs. Moriatty, alluding to Lady O'More, "and so is her pretended affection for your papa. I feel convinced that the reason she came to Withyslea was to try and coax him to make her an allowance, or to provide for her son Denis. But I think the only condition on which papa would help her would be that she never showed her face here again. He is so worried that he actually talks about it in his sleep, a thing I have never known him do before, during thirty years of married life. But there, she tried to be kind to you, May, so I suppose we must say no more about it. She would have liked to have trapped my girl for her *daughter-in-law*," continues Mrs. Moriatty to Mrs. Vangel, "*but I am glad to think she was defeated, and our dear Lewis got her instead.*"

"Don't talk of Aunt Kathleen any more, mamma," cries May, with a nervous shiver; "her visit must come to an end soon. She cannot stay forever."

"But my dear, she can come back again. Having once made her way into the Manor House, I foresee no end to her invasions. She has any amount of impudence. Your papa declares, if she ever bombards us again without an invitation, that he shall make every one of you come and live at the Manor House, so that every nook and corner may be filled."

"Why not turn it into an Union at once?" says Lewis merrily. "Then you and Mr. Moriarty would be in your element, feeding a lot of paupers with your hard-earned savings."

"Hold your tongue, you saucy boy," exclaims Mrs. Moriarty, as she puts one arm round her daughter's neck, and the other round that of her son-in-law, and looks perfectly happy.

But, for all their jesting, the nuisance continues, and Lady O'More remains a fixture at the Manor House, whilst the Lewis Vangels become almost strangers there. When the month has expired, Anna returns to her duties at St. Swithin's Hospital. She has enjoyed her holiday, but she carries vague apprehensions concerning May back with her, which are not to be allayed by her mother's fanciful solution. As soon as her sister-in-law has left them, May turns her attention more particularly to the cottage hospital, which has already received several patients. A lad with a fractured thigh, an old woman with muscular rheumatism, and a young girl with some internal complaint—these are cases which Lewis is not only willing, but glad, to hand over to his wife's care. A nice, motherly matron has been selected to look after the cottage and its inmates, and it is May's department to visit them each afternoon, and see that her husband's morning orders have been religiously carried out. She

seems to take a strange delight in the employment, for one so young. Even Mrs. Vangel says she makes a martyr of herself. Whatever pleasanter occupation may be in view, May refuses to delegate this duty to any one else, but walks deliberately off to her hospital ever afternoon, with her little basket on her arm. She reads to the sick people, and talks to them. She insists upon seeing the remedies carried out under her own eyes. She even, in some instances, applies them with her own hands. She will kneel for an hour at a time beside the old woman's bed, rubbing her stiffened and aching joints with balsamic oils, and delighted if the poor creature says she feels relief. Mrs. Mason, the matron, often remonstrates with the doctor's wife on her undignified behavior.

"Lor bless you, ma'am," she says, "don't go for to kneel by Betsy Crake in that nice new gownd. You'll ruin it, a-trailing on the floor. And I can give 'er another good rub down, if you considers it necessary. That nasty oil will mess you so, It ain't fit for you to handle it. Look how it marks your nails. I expect the doctor will be rarely angry with me for letting you do sich a thing."

"The doctor won't be angry at all, Mrs. Mason, and you must let me have my own way," replies May, with a sad smile. "I know you can do it, but I want to help you. And poor Betsy suffers so much pain, it is a comfort to be able to relieve her a little.

"Oh, and it do relieve her, ma'am, wonderful. She says she hasn't been so easy for years. You see, she never slept under no blankets till she came to the orsepital, and that's bad for her complaint. And that's a beautiful oil. Quite mirackles."

And so May's soft fingers continue to rub the old cottager's shrivelled limbs, and her young voice is heard, day after day, reading aloud to the feverish lad and the prostrate girl, till they watch the position of the sun upon

the window-panes, that they may know when it will be time for her to return, and transport them from their sick-beds to the enchanted scenes which she tells them of.

One day—about three weeks after Anna's departure—the Vicar encounters her on the threshold of the little hospital.

"I have just paid a visit to your sick friends, May," he says (he has known her from a little child, and always called her by her Christian name), "and been listening to nothing but your praises. Withyslea should be very much obliged to you and your husband for having founded this little refuge. You are doing a great work, my dear, and I congratulate you on the first results."

"Oh, indeed, Mr. Crosbie," exclaims May, blushing and stammering, "I deserve no praise. I have had nothing to do with it. It was Lewis's thought to use his old house for the purpose, and my father and mother, aided by a few friends like yourself, have supplied the necessary funds."

"I don't wish to rob them of the merit of any part of their good work," replies the Vicar, "but I cannot have you rob yourself, May. You are giving up what is far more valuable to you than even your husband's and parents' contributions—your time and your pleasure. It is a willing sacrifice, my dear young friend. It is useless denying it to me, and it will be recorded to your benefit at the last day."

"Oh, Mr. Crosbie, if I could only think so—if I could believe that any good one may do will help to blot out the evil, I should work all day, and all night too."

"My dear child, can you doubt it? Are not our acts of kindness, and benevolence, and charity so many gifts to lay upon God's altar in atonement for our shortcomings? You are so young, May, and your life has been so happily guarded from all temptation and danger, that your sins *must be*, comparatively speaking, light ones; still we

shall have to account for irritable tempers and indolence and impatience, though they may appear small faults to excite the anger of Heaven."

"But Mr. Crosbie, you said in one of your sermons that there were no such thing as *small* faults, and that God will judge us by the opportunities we have received, more than by the deeds we have actually done."

"Quite true, my dear child. But also by the graces we have omitted to profit by. A girl brought up as you have been, by good and honorable parents, surrounded by comfort, and carefully guarded from everything that might contaminate you, are far more responsible in the eyes of Heaven than the poor young woman lying here, who tells me that she has never read the Bible for herself, nor heard it, except on Sundays in church."

"Would a sin in me, then—any sin, a lie, a theft, an injury—be so *very* much worse than in other people, Mr. Crosbie?" asks Mrs. Lewis Vangel, with her eyes upon the ground.

"Oh, my dear young friend, incomparably worse. For where are your temptations to sin, or your opportunities, like those of these poor half-educated creatures? If you transgressed any of God's laws, it would be indeed a rejection of grace, for your eyes have been opened to His commandments since a child."

"Of course, of course. I know you are right," says, May, in a constrained voice.

"So I am all the more glad to find that your heart is in the right place, and that you have a proper notion of your responsibilities. My Charlotte is pleased to see it too. You could not follow a brighter example than that of my dear partner. From a child she has been as a shining light, burning brighter and brighter as she approaches the perfect day. I wish you visited us oftener, my child. *She could teach you so much that perhaps you have no idea of now,*"

"I have not much time for visiting, Mr. Crosbie. Lewis likes to have me at home whilst he is there, and my mother and father make large demands on my leisure. They miss me so much at the Manor House."

"Naturally; but Lady O'More is staying there now, is she not? My dear wife and I called on her first arrival, and thought her very charming, though a little bigoted, perhaps. But with a great air of *ton*, nevertheless."

"My aunt is there still, but she is going shortly. Papa and mamma have arranged to take a little run to London themselves, and so Lady O'More is obliged to leave."

"Oh, indeed. Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty will be sorry to part with her, I am sure. There is no saying what might not have happened if she had stayed a little longer, and been persuaded to attend our blessed services. I am glad to see you such a regular attendant, May. I was almost afraid at one time that Doctor Vangel's influence might have an opposite effect upon you."

"Because he doesn't care about going to church himself?" rejoins the young wife quickly. "That is because you don't know Lewis, Mr. Crosbie. He has the best and kindest heart in the world. Whatever his own opinions may be, he would never interfere with those of other people. He leaves me the most perfect liberty in all things. I may do exactly as I like."

"Then why not take advantage of his indulgence, May, and accept all the privileges which the Church can confer upon you? Why not come to confession? I am ready to hear you every Saturday afternoon from two till four. My dear Charlotte pours her little tale into my ear, as regularly as though I did not already know each aspiration of her pure heart, each action of her blameless life. Why do you not follow her example?"

"I don't know," says May childishly.

"Don't suppose that you must wait till you have something serious to tell me. That day, I trust, may never

come. But the Church is as ready to receive the confession of the smallest fault as of the most heinous crime. For absolution is as necessary to one as to the other. It is better to confess a crime, and be absolved from its consequences, than to hold back one little fault to remain forever a blot upon your soul."

"But if—" says May demurringly, and without looking in Mr. Crosbie's rosy face—"if one does go to confession, one must confess *everything*. Is it not so?"

"Most certainly. An insincere confession is worse than no confession at all. But I don't fancy that you would mind confessing everything, May?"

"Oh, no, no, of course not. Only it must be so difficult—so impossible—to remember every little thing that one has done wrong from a baby."

"It is not so hard as you may imagine, and the Church makes allowance for the defects of memory. But if you cannot recall all the little sins, you can at least the big ones. They stand out in clear, hard lines against the background of our consciences. Is it not so?"

"I suppose it may be," is the reluctant answer.

"And you would find it such a comfort. My Charlotte says she did not know what peace meant until she had knelt in the confessional. The dear soul came prepared to tell her minutest faults, such venial errors as a less innocent-minded creature would never have recognized as such. One was, I can remember, that she had hastily pushed the cat aside with her foot when it came in her way. I smiled as I heard it, but inwardly I chanted a *Te Deum* for having been elected the earthly and spiritual guardian of so pure a soul."

"And does Mr. Somerset confess to you, too?" asks May, with unconscious sarcasm.

"Yes, and I to him. Priests are not exempt from any of the Church's ordinances. And before long, May, I hope *I shall* number you amongst my penitents."

"Perhaps. When I can muster up courage, if my mother has no objection, Mr. Crosbie," says the girl vaguely, as she parts from him and enters the Cottage Hospital. The matron meets her on the threshold.

"We've two fresh cases to-day, ma'am," she commences, with a curtesy, "and there's been a gentleman asking for you."

"A gentleman?" reiterates May, as she enters the little parlor. "Who is he?"

"I don't know, ma'am. He's quite a stranger to me. I was thinking, maybe, he might a' come from Leaton to see if we'd any room in the orsepital to spare."

"Oh, no! That's impossible. Besides, they have an hospital of their own there. Did he ask for the doctor?"

"No, ma'am; for you and nobody else. 'Is Mrs. Lewis Vangel 'ere!' sez he, and I sez, sez I, 'No, but I expects 'er momentarily, sir, and will you please to walk in,' and he sat in this parlor till the Vicar come, and then he walked out into the horchard."

"Is he in the orchard now?"

"I think he is, ma'am. Shall I go and see?"

"Yes; and tell him I have arrived, though I can't imagine what he can want of me," replies May, placing her basket on the table, and removing her warm mantle, hat, and gloves, preparatory to visiting her patients. Having done so, she stands looking out of the window, waiting the arrival of the stranger, and thinking over her conversation with the Vicar. In about a couple of minutes Mrs. Mason returns. She merely says, "The gentleman, ma'am," and immediately retires. May turns round, and every drop of blood deserts her face. The visitor is her cousin, Denis O'More. She gives vent to a low ejaculation, and sinks into a chair.

"Why, Mary, me sweet cousin, aren't you pleased to see me?" he demands, with all his Irish audacity.

"Glad!" she reiterates. "Why should I be glad?"

Why have you come here? Where have you come from?"

"I've come to see *you*, of course. And I've come from the Manor House, where me mother is staying with me uncle. Me Uncle Dan might have asked me to spend a few days with him, but he didn't. The ties of blood are, perhaps, stronger in me than in him. So I came without an invitation to fetch me mother home, and to see your-self again, Mary."

"You might have spared me, then. You must have known that the sight of you could give me no pleasure."

"And why? Aren't ye married yourself, May, and is all our charming acquaintance to be forgotten because you've followed my unworthy example? Come, now, ye were very angry with me indeed in Paris, and I confess I should have been bolder, and told you the truth at once. But now that you're married yourself, ye must see that these worldly ties make very little difference to the feelings of the heart, and a pretty girl's a pretty girl to a man all the world over, whether he's free or not."

By this time May has overcome the shock of Denis O'More's unexpected appearance, and is able to answer him as she should. The color has returned to her face, her eyes glow with indignation, and, if looks could kill, her cousin would lie at her feet, stretched out and dead.

"Yes," she replies. "You are right. I *am* married, and I love my husband."

Denis O'More gives vent to an amused chuckle.

"Ah, indeed! I'm very glad to hear it. He must be a happy man. An' do ye love him better than ye did me, now, Mary?"

"*Better?*" she echoes scornfully; "the feelings are not to be compared with one another. I never loved *you*."

"Ah! come now, May, no fibbing. You never loved *me*! What? have you forgotten the times out of mind

we've stole away together to the Crystal Palace, and Bushey Park, and gone down the river? And the day we spent at Saint Cloud—"

"Hush! hush!" cries the girl, stopping her ears. "You shall not speak of them. I will not listen. Have you no consideration—no mercy? Have you ever thought what those days did for me? That they transformed me from an innocent, trusting girl into a miserable woman?"

"Ah! come now, that's not very complimentary to Doctor Vangel. Isn't he good to ye, Mary?"

"It is because he is *so* good that I am miserable. It is because he is so incomparably higher, and better, and kinder than you were to me, that I have learned to see you in your true light, and dispise you, It is because I was weak enough to listen to you first, that I feel myself unworthy to be my husband's wife."

"Ah, but me dear, child, that's nonsense now, nobody marries their first love; plenty of people have been happy together before you and me, and no one is the wiser nor the worse for it. Come, me dear May, be reasonable, forget the past if it annoys ye to think of it, and look on me only as your Cousin Denis."

And he approaches her as he speaks, but the girl waves him off excitedly.

"Don't touch me, don't come one step nearer, or I will call the matron. I feel as if—were your hand to clasp mine, or even your clothes to brush against me—I must go straight home and tell my husband everything."

"This is infatuation," says Denis O'More, in an offended tone, as he returns to his former position.

"You may call it what you like, but it is true. Denis O'More, you have done me the greatest injury that lay in your power; you have made me despise myself. Do you know how many days and nights I have lain, face downward, on the floor, praying to God to take me out of a *world which I felt I had disgraced?* Can you conceive

the agony I have passed through, the horror I have experienced at my mother's kiss, the repugnance to meeting my former associates and friends? But I have had to do it, and to smile and appear to be the same as ever, and all the while I have hated myself and hated you, and wished we had both died before we met each other."

"That was very kind of you, me dear cousin, both kind and complimentary," says Mr. Denis O'More.

"Ah, don't talk to me of kindness or compliment, you who are my moral murderer. My dear husband loved me, and wished to marry me; he told me so before I ever saw you; I married him because I hoped to make him happy, but I have cursed myself. Each day convinces me more and more that I'm not fit to be his wife. I, who was once so frank, so open, and confiding, and whom you have transformed into a liar, and a fraud, and a hypocrite."

"It appears to me, me dear Mary, that ye argue the matter with unnecessary warmth; but, if ye really hold these extraordinary notions about honor and confidence, why not follow them up and tell Doctor Vangel everything?"

She looks at him with undisguised contempt.

"You coward," she answers; "how *can* I, and when I have told you that *I love him*?"

"Well, there is only one alternative, silence and forgetfulness; let me advise ye to adopt them, May, ye will have plenty of other women to keep ye company."

"God help them! I hope not. I hope there are a few wives in the world who are worthy of all their husbands' love and trust."

'Maybe, but I haven't met them. Me own is a beauty; she never lets me alone from one day to another, but follows me everywhere, and the more public the place, the better she likes to kick up a shindy. I'm just afraid to *show me face* an-nywhere, May. I've lost more friends *than I could count to ye* since I let the wor-uld know *that I was married*."

"You bear your share of the cross too, then," says Mary Vangel sadly ; "I am sorry for you, Denis, I would have been content to suffer alone, but if we are both patient, it may pass."

"*Yours* has passed, me dear girl ; you're safely married and no more har-rum will come to ye. But, faith, I don't see the end of mine at all ; and she's as strong and lusty a young woman as ever ye saw ; she'll dance on me coffin yet."

"You brought your trouble on yourself, Denis, as I did mine, and we must bear it as best we may. But I cannot, and I *will not*, see you again ; you bring me so many painful recollections, I cannot trust myself. How long shall you stay at the Manor?"

"Ah, sure, how can I tell ; two or three days, perhaps. Me uncle and me aunt didn't seem over-pleased to see me, but I came on a matter of business, and I must remain till it's concluded."

"You must not come near Wotton House during your stay in Withyslea, then, nor must you waylay me in this manner again ; if you do, I shall appeal to my husband for protection, and that would make it unpleasant for you. He knows that we were—were—fond of each other, I have told him so much, and he would consider it very unmanly in you to attempt to molest me against my will. Doctor Vangel's interference might be attended with undesirable consequence for yourself."

"*And not for you, May, me dear?*" he says interrogatively.

"You mean that you would tell of me?" she replies, with a heaving breast. "I believe you are capable of it, but I defy you. Do your worst, Denis O'More, You can hardly make me more miserable than you have done already. And now please to leave me, or our interview will excite curiosity. No ! I will not take your hand, *not even say good-bye.* Everything is over between us for-

ever. You can never be anything but a stranger to me."

"Ah, well, you're very hard for such a pretty girl, but I'll obey ye, Mary," says Denis O'More, with affected indifference, as he saunters out of the cottage hospital.

But though he promises obedience, the girl feels that there is no trust to be put in him, and that she may be walking over a mine.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FEVER FIEND.

As soon as her cousin is fairly out of sight, and she has wiped away the tears that have started to her eyes, May rings for the matron, and proceeds to make her daily inspection of the invalids. If Lewis Vangel had only known that she was doing so, he would have ridden home in hot haste to prevent her. That very morning, when he had started for an hour or more upon his rounds, his horse might have been seen standing outside the Wotton House gates, whilst he shouted a message to his mother. Now, if old Mrs. Vangel prides herself upon one thing more than another, it is upon her unimpaired power of hearing. It is often so with those who are getting on in life. They shrink from acknowledging they are losing the gifts of their youth. If you had accused Mrs. Vangel of being lame, or having lost her memory, she would have laughed good-humoredly at the joke, for she was upright as a dart,—could walk miles at a stretch if it pleased her,—and remember the minutest incidents of her life. But to hint she did not hear quite so readily as she had once done was to offend her. On this occasion Lewis was in a great hurry—had only ridden back, indeed, on account of *his wife*, and, seeing his mother in the front of the house, *with a woolen wrap twisted about her head, employed in*

admiring the snowdrops and crocuses that had just commenced to gem the flower-beds, he thought he would not stop to dismount.

"Mother," he called out to her, "tell May she is *not* to go to the cottage hospital to-day!"

"Very well, my dear," responded Mrs. Vangel.

"Are you sure you heard me distinctly? She is not to visit the hospital this afternoon. Do you understand?"

"Why, of course I understand, Lewis," said the old lady testily. "To hear you speak one would imagine I had lost my senses."

"All right, then. Be sure and tell her. I haven't a moment to spare," and off he galloped as hard as ever he could.

Mrs. Vangel was quite put out for a little while by her son's implied doubt of her capabilities, but it did not prevent her delivering his message. Coming across May half an hour later, she said, in rather a dry tone, "I saw Lewis pass the gate a little while ago, my dear, and he desired me to tell you to go to the cottage hospital this afternoon."

"Lewis in Withyslea at this hour, mother? How very strange! I wonder what brought him back? He had some very particular business this morning, and had to start directly after breakfast."

"I don't know, May. He said no more than I have told you. Perhaps he returned to deliver the message."

May laughed.

"Oh, no, mother, surely not! I can't understand his mentioning the subject. Don't I *always* go to the hospital in the afternoon? I have hardly missed a day since I commenced visiting there. Was that really all he said?"

"Well, my dear, if there had been any more, I should have informed you," replied Mrs. Vangel. "What object could I have in keeping it back? He told me what I have repeated to you, and galloped off again as hard as

he could. He never stopped to give any reason for saying so. Just those words, and nothing more."

"Well, it is quite inexplicable to me, but perhaps he is going to meet me there," replied May, as she went about her business. The strangeness of her husband's unnecessary message recurred to her mind more than once during the day. She half-suspected there must be some mistake, but did not like to irritate her mother-in-law by saying so, and at the usual time she dressed herself and went to the hospital, as we have seen. Once there, her interviews with the Vicar and her cousin drove everything else out of her head, and when, after Denis O'More's departure, she summoned Mrs. Mason, she was sick, and trembling with excitement and fear.

"Lor, ma'am!" ejaculates the matron, as soon as she sees her, "I hopes as that gentleman haven't been and annoyed you in any way? Why, bless my 'art, you're as white as a sheet. Will you have a drop of beer, now, or shall I brew you some tea?"

"No, no, Mrs. Mason, nothing, thank you. I am better now. I am used to these attacks. They have nothing to do with—with the gentleman. He is my cousin, Mr. O'More. He came down to see me with a—a message from my father," replies May, with much stammering and hesitation. "And how are your patients, Mrs. Mason? Did Fletcher take the medicine Doctor Vangel sent him?"

"Bless you, ma'am, in course he did. 'Twould be as much as my place is worth to disobey the doctor's orders, though 'twas pretty nigh half-an-hour before I could get it down his throat, and the lad fought me, there, like a hyena," replies the matron, getting mixed in her zoology; "but the new patients, and the work of getting ready for 'em, have driven pretty nearly everything else out of my head."

"The new patients!" cries May, startled. "I have not heard of them. Who are they?"

"Lor, ma'am, why, I told you when you first came in ! It's two of the Rabbitt girls from Higham Close."

"Why, what's the matter with them?"

"I don't know, ma'am, and I think the doctor's uncertain himself. He rode round here in a terrible hurry about eleven o'clock this morning to tell me to get the beds ready in the attic, and to keep them quite close there till he could see them again. And in about an hour afterwards they come over themselves, wrapt up in blankets, in Jacob Perry's close cart. They're feverish and dry, but they don't seem very bad neither, and they've bin a laughing and talking with each other ever since they come."

"Are they those pretty, fair-haired little girls who lost their mother last Christmas?"

"Yes, ma'am. Poor Rabbitts was left with a family o' nine, and these are the only daughters. They're twelve and fourteen years old."

"Poor little things! I'll go up and see them at once," says May, rising.

"If you please, ma'am," interposes the matron, barring the way, "don't you think as it would be better to wait till the doctor have pronounced on them? I fancy they've got some sort of a fever?"

"Well, Mrs. Mason, and do you think I'm afraid of fevers."

"Oh, no, ma'am! I know you're a brave young lady, as doesn't fear anything, but I wouldn't like to get into trouble with the doctor, as might say I should have prevented you."

"Well, then, Mrs. Mason," replies May, with a sad smile, "to allay your fears, I may tell you I come by my husband's orders. He rode round to Wotton House also this morning, and left a message. I was to come here this afternoon. I didn't understand it at first, but I do now. He probably has work at a distance, and wishes me to see after these poor girls for him. Let us go up to them at once"

"Oh! if it's by the doctor's orders," says the matron, as she precedes the young wife upstairs. The attic is a good-sized apartment, with two beds in it. The patients do not look very ill as yet, for their eyes are bright, and their cheeks flushed and rosy. But their hands are very hot, and the elder girl is becoming drowsy.

"I expect they are going to have measles, or something of that sort," says May, after she has said a few kind words to each.

"Please, ma'am, we had measles, and hooping-cough, and chicken-pox afore mother died," pipes the younger girl.

"And I don't fancy as the doctor would have sent 'em over here all the way from Higham Close for sech a trifle, ma'am," adds Mrs. Mason. "Why, this fills us up. We couldn't take another patient if he was a-dying."

"Well, we must wait till the doctor comes to set us right, and I daresay they will be quite well in a few days, and able to go back to their father," says May cheerfully. "Meanwhile, Mrs. Mason, bring me some vinegar and water, and a sponge, and I will try to cool these poor hot hands and heads."

"Hadn't you better leave it to me, ma'am, and go and sit in the lower rooms?" whispers the matron. "Richards and Fletcher are looking out for you eagerly."

"I am afraid I must disappoint them to-day, Mrs. Mason, for you said Doctor Vangel desired you to isolate these patients, so, having seen them, I had better not mix with the others until I have my husband's leave."

She continues to sit, therefore, for the best part of two hours by the side of the sick girls, bathing their brows and hands, combing out their tangled hair, making them lemonade and barley-water, and soothing their fears with the assurance of a speedy recovery. The elder girl has ceased *her chatter*, and appears too drowsy even to listen to *what is said*. Her face has become crimson and swol-

len ; she turns her head away from the light, and throws off the bedclothes impatiently. The younger one cries with the headache, and asks to be allowed to get up and go into the open air. May has to exert all her lately-acquired nursing skill to keep them quiet, as she passes from one bed to the other, with kind words and gentle fingers. At one moment the younger girl is so impressed by her goodness and patience, that she suddenly throws her arms round her neck and kisses her. May disengages herself from the clinging embrace with a passing idea that it may not be without danger to herself, and begins to read aloud in order to keep the child quiet. As she is thus engaged, she hears a sudden exclamation. Lewis has come upstairs, and is standing in the doorway.

"May !" he ejaculates, in a voice of annoyance. "*You* here ? "

"Yes, Lewis, didn't you expect to see me ? "

"On the contrary, I returned home this morning expressly to tell you *not* to pay your visit here this afternoon. Didn't my mother give you my message ? "

"I am sorry, dear," says May quietly, "but there has been some mistake. Mother told me you said I *was* to come here. I thought it strange at the time, but I am glad it has happened so, all the same, for these poor children have needed me sadly."

"I am not glad at all, May, for I wish to pronounce on their case first. However, go now, my darling ; go into the orchard just as you are, and walk up and down briskly till I join you."

"I begged your lady not to enter this room, sir," says Mrs. Mason, who has come with him, "but she said she had your permission."

"Yes, yes, it is no one's fault. It is an unfortunate mistake, but I daresay no harm is done," replies Lewis, though he looks disturbed as he examines his patients.

The elder girl engages most of his attention. He has

a candle lighted (for the afternoon is far advanced), and, opening the front of her nightdress, holds it carefully above her chest. He searches for a few moments in silence, then he gives a muttered note of disappointment.

"*There* it is, you see, Mrs. Mason, I was afraid I was not mistaken, though there were no decided proofs this morning."

"Lor, sir, what?"

He points to a red spot or two on the girl's chest, then, lifting her hair, shows another on the temple.

"Pimples, doctor?"

"The worst sort of pimples, nurse. They are pustules. She has the small-pox."

"*The small-pox!*" exclaims the matron. "Bless my 'art, the whole of Withyslea will take it."

"We will hope not," replies Lewis. "It is to prevent such a contingency I sent them here. Being the only girls, they have slept together, and I hope the rest of the family may escape contagion. That is why I ordered you to keep them separate."

"But your young lady, sir," says Mrs. Mason, with a gasp of fear. "It was by no fault of mine that she would come up and sit here the whole afternoon. Suppose anything should happen to her?"

"I am sorry she should have mistaken my wishes," he replies, "but Mrs. Vangel is quite prepared to run the same risks as I do. However, I will go now and take her home, and see my patients later on."

He speaks calmly, and in his usual tone of voice, but his heart is throbbing violently the while. What if his darling, the very light of his life, were to fall ill of this terrible disorder? But it is impossible. He will not even contemplate such a thing. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Above all, he must not frighten her with *his unfounded* terrors. She is walking up and down the orchard as he joins her, not quite so briskly, perhaps,

as he desired, but bareheaded, and with her woollen garments exposed to the disinfecting influence of the open air. As her husband comes up with her, he slips his arm about her waist, and gazes fondly into her sweet, fair face. How little he dreams it will be one of the last times that he will look upon it in all its girlish charm.

"My darling," he whispers, "do you remember how many times you and I have walked up and down this stupid little orchard, and thought it the most beautiful place on earth?"

"And so it is still, Lewis, when *you* are here."

"Do you really love me so much as all that?"

"I love you the very best of all the world. Don't you know it? Why should you ask?"

"Because sometimes you are sad, my sweet wife, and I fancy you may regret (just a little) having tied yourself for life to such a poor beggar as I am. It must be so monotonous for you in this dull village, with no better company than my old mother and myself."

She turns and throws her arms about his neck, and looks full into his earnest eyes.

"Lewis, darling, you pain me. I want no change. I could have no better company. I love you, and, in being your wife, I have all I can possibly desire."

"Then I may tell you a piece of news, May, without fearing to excite or disturb you."

"Yes, dear; but I think I know your news already. My cousin is at the Manor House."

"Who told you, love?"

"*He* did. I found him waiting for me here this afternoon."

Lewis's face flushes.

"Why did he come *here*? Why did he not call to see you in the usual manner at your own house?"

"Because he is a coward. Because he was uncertain how much or how little I had told you concerning our

acquaintance, and he was afraid to meet you until he knew what attitude you would assume towards him."

"He need not be afraid," says Lewis, smiling. "I have won the prize, and can afford to shake hands with my rival."

"No, no, you shall not! He is not worthy of your friendship!" exclaims May quickly. "I have forbidden him to show his face at Wotton House, nor will I visit my parents whilst he is with them. No one invited him here. He has no right to be in Withyslea at all."

"But, May, my dearest," replies Lewis seriously, "is it politic to resent the past so openly? Will it not make *that* public which is much better concealed? The man behaved infamously to you. I acknowledge that, and I despise him thoroughly; but he is your cousin, and to enter into an open warfare with him is to make people inquire the reason. You need not be friendly with him. You need not even meet him. But I would not have forbidden him the house."

"Oh, but, Lewis, you don't know—you don't know!" cries May, sobbing.

"Darling, I think I *do* know, or, at all events, I can guess. You confided in me before our marriage, like a dear, honorable girl, and I have never ceased to respect you for it. The man is a blackguard, and gives another proof of it by thrusting his company upon you here. But you are safe from him now, May—safe in my arms. Don't you think it would be better to treat him with cool indifference instead of open resentment? else he may think that you care for him still."

"Oh, Lewis, how could he, and when I am married to you?"

"My dear child, these sort of men are always ready to flatter themselves, and he might imagine you became *my wife* simply out of pique, and because you couldn't marry him."

"I never, *never* want to see him again," replies May, amidst her tears. "I hate the sight of him, and the remembrance of my own folly."

"Then you shall not see him, dearest. I promised you that long ago. And, if you like, I will send my mother and you away from Withyslea till Mr. O'More has turned his back on it. But come home now. You have had sufficient fumigation, and remember, you must not visit the hospital again without my leave."

May wipes her eyes, and turns to re-enter the house and resume her walking attire.

"What is the matter with the Rabbitts, Lewis?" she asks.

"They are feverish, dear. Their symptoms may turn to anything," he answers vaguely, as he accompanies her to Wotton House.

The subject of her leaving Withyslea for a short time, under the care of her mother-in-law, is mooted more than once during the next few days, but it is not accomplished, for May seems indifferent about it, and does not feel inclined to go. How narrowly her husband watches her during these days of probation the young wife never knows, but she cannot rise, nor sit down, nor speak, nor be silent, without his eyes taking in each word and action. Meanwhile, Rabbitts's two girls have developed the small-pox in its worst phase; several other cases have broken out in the village, and it is impossible to keep the nature of the complaint a secret.

"It is an ill wind that blows no one any good," and this ill wind quickly clears Withyslea of the O'Mores. Her ladyship has the greatest dread of the infection, and her son does not wish his pretty face spoiled. So they hurry back to London, greatly to the delight of the Moriatys, who do not yet know that their daughter has been exposed to the contagion.

One afternoon, about ten days after the Rabbitts were

admitted to the hospital, Lewis Vangel returns home earlier than usual, and inquires for his wife.

"Dear May has a headache, and feels rather tired," replies his mother complacently, as she looks at him over her spectacles, "so I advised her to lie down. I think you will find her in the drawing-room."

Lewis rushes into the drawing-room, but it is deserted, and the fire has gone out. He tears up the staircase like a whirlwind, and enters his wife's bedroom. On the bed lies May, dressed in her usual apparel, heavily sleeping.

"May, May darling," he exclaims, trying to rouse her, "wake up! I want to speak to you."

May raises her heavy eyelids with an effort, stares at her husband as if she did not know who he is, and bursts into a frightened flood of tears.

"What is the matter, my own girl? Why are you lying here? Do you feel ill?"

"Oh, my head, my head! I think it will burst," says May, holding it with both her hands.

Lewis feels the poor head. It is indeed burning hot. So is her body. He tests her temperature, and his heart becomes as heavy as lead. There is no doubt of it. She has taken the fever. The young man rises suddenly and walks once or twice up and down the room, then approaches the bed again, and says, in the tenderest voice,—

"Indeed you are not well, my May. You have taken a cold. Let me undress you and put you into bed, and then I will fetch something to relieve your head."

With the care and gentleness of a sympathetic woman, he unbuttons and unties the different garments, and having lifted the girl (who seems half asleep again) into the bed, and laid her head tenderly upon the pillow, he covers her up, and leaves the room. Outside, on the landing, his *courage* for a moment forsakes him, and the tears well up into his dark blue eyes.

"*My May! My May!*" he thinks, with a groan. "Oh, no, it cannot be! She *must* be spared to me. Why should I stand here dreading the worst, when I do not even know in what degree she may have contracted the disease? Where *she* is concerned, I am a regular coward. But my mother and hers must be told of it at once."

It is almost impossible to describe the commotion which ensues upon the reception of this terrible news. Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty, who are so devoted to their child, anticipate the worst from the very beginning, and mourn for Mary as if she were already given over. Old Mrs. Vangel wrings her hands, and follows Lewis about the house whenever he is at home, but is of very little practical use to the invalid. The poor young doctor, who is suffering agonies of mind, and yet is compelled to attend to his other patients, sees that it is absolutely necessary that May should have a skilled and certificated nurse, with whom he can leave her in perfect confidence, and telegraphs to his sister Anna to send him such a one without delay. His message is answered by his sister herself, who declares that no one else shall nurse his wife to convalescence. When Lewis first meets her after her arrival, he is so grateful and relieved that he breaks down and cries like a child.

"Why, Lewis," exclaims Anna, more disturbed than she will show, "it is not so bad as this, surely? You are letting your natural anxiety run away with your judgment, my dear brother."

"Oh, Anna, it is as bad as it can be. I try to hope everything from her youth and strong constitution, but she has the disease in its confluent form, and the fever seems to mock at all my remedies. Thank God you have come! How good of you it is to have done so."

"Why, dearest, to whom should I go in trouble or sickness but my own dear people? If the authorities

had refused me leave, I should have come without it. I guessed how your heart must be torn in two at having to leave her, even for an hour."

"Yes; and so many want my help just now. I have had to borrow another horse from Mr. Moriarty's stables. Oh, Anna what a comfort it is to have you here. Poor mother is not of much use. She is not strong enough to take her share of sitting up, and as for Mrs. Moriarty, my whole object is to keep her out of the sickroom, because she has no control over her feelings, and I am so afraid that my wife may take alarm from her emotion, though I don't suppose she understands it."

"Is May delirious then?"

"Delirious, dear? She has never had her senses since the night she was stricken down. She was very much worried just beforehand, and it made the disease take a double hold upon her. Her whole idea seems to be that she is pursued by Mr. Crosbie. Poor Mr. Crosbie. I think he is a feeling man. He has inquired constantly after her. You will be prepared to see her a pitiable object, Anna."

"My dear brother, I have nursed patients with small-pox before."

"Of course, but my poor May is worse than most cases. Her sweet face is positively covered. I have taken every known precaution to prevent her being scarred. But that is nothing compared with her precious life."

"Come, Lewis, this misfortune has unnerved you. We must put our shoulders to the wheel, brother, and hope for the best. Take me to our dear May at once, and I will never leave her side as long as she requires me."

But though she does all she can to give Lewis hope and courage, and though she is used to seeing disease in its worst forms, Anna Vangel is terribly shocked when she meets her sister-in-law again. May is indeed very—*very* ill—"sick unto death." Her young, full-blooded body is

grappling with the enemy by day and night, whilst her mind (enfeebled by the strain that has been laid upon it) has utterly succumbed and broken down. She lies upon her pillows, blinded and disfigured by the cruel disease, with blackened tongue and cracked lips, faintly articulating, "water! water!" or screaming out in terror that the Vicar is pursuing her, and she is in a churchyard full of grinning skulls. She knows no one. When Lewis hangs over her, his kind eyes full of love and pity, and without one thought of repugnance at her terrible condition, she pushes him away, and mutters that she will tell her husband if he presumes to approach her. When Anna tends her, with the softest of voices and fingers, she moans that she is a cat scratching her with her talons, and screams for Lewis to drive her away. And the miserable part of it is, that, with all their watching and care—watching that keeps one or other at her bedside night and day, and care that hardly permits them to eat a mouthful of food except as they stand there, May grows gradually worse instead of better.

After three weeks of delirium and fever, the crisis arrives, and, passing, leaves the patient sensible, but sinking. Anna sees the danger, and feels she must tell her brother. May is too weak for anything—too weak almost to swallow—too weak, her nurse fears, in any case, to rally. She goes out upon the landing to meet Lewis as he returns home.

"Lewis," she whispers, her eyes full of tears, "be brave!"

"My God," he gasps, "she is gone?"

"No, dear, not yet, but I fear it will not be long. There are no signs of rallying in her. She can scarcely swallow a drop of wine, but she is sensible, and she has asked for you. Go to her. I am about to get a hot-water bottle to put to her feet."

"Wait a minute," he replies, clutching at her arm.
"Wait a minute."

He steadies himself, whilst two or three hoarse sobs break from his throat.

"*Going*," he ejaculates under his breath. "Going, so young, so loved. God, it is *too* cruel!" Then he rouses himself, and exclaims almost fiercely,— "Why haven't you sent to Todhampton for Doctor Godfrey? I told you to do so, if needful."

She answers him compassionately,—

"My poor darling, I would have done so at once, if he could be of any good. But what could he do that you have not already done? It is Heaven's will, Lewis; you must be resigned."

"*Resigned!* when my very life is dying before my eyes? Send Jim on the gray cob to Todhampton for Godfrey at once, Anna, and I will go into my—wife."

He pronounces the last word with a deep-drawn sigh, as if he wondered how long she will be so, and then turns the handle of her bedroom door and goes in. May is lying perfectly silent and still, with her hollow eyes fixed upon the waning light. She recognizes her husband, but she displays no surprise or pleasure at seeing him. He stoops over her and smiles in her poor, disfigured face.

"Well, my own darling," he says, with forced cheerfulness.

"Lewis," the parched lips whisper back, whilst a look of fear comes into her eyes. "Lewis, *am I dying?*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CONFESSION.

At first Lewis Vangel does not know how to reply. He holds her hand in his. It is cold and clammy, with *the dews of death*. He feels her heart. Its pulsations are *as feeble* as they can be. To all appearance she has not

many hours to live. And yet, how is he to tell her they must part? It seems impossible to him.

"My own dear wife," he says impressively, "you have been very ill, but we are doing everything in our power to bring you round, and, with God's blessing we hope soon to see you well again."

"Tell me the truth," she repeats earnestly, "am I dying?"

"Dearest, have I not answered you?"

"No. Lewis! you have never told me a lie. Anna says you never told one in your life. Don't deceive me now. I feel I have been very ill. All the past is a blank, and I only know I am too weak to think or remember. Shall I ever get well again? Tell me the truth."

She has fixed her eyes upon him, and all the unhappy man can do is to lay his head down beside hers, and try to stifle his sobs.

"That is enough," continues May faintly, "I understand! Poor Lewis! Don't cry, dear! I won't torture you much more. Only—how long?"

"What do you mean, my darling?"

"How long do you think that I shall live?"

"If you don't rally from this extreme weakness," replies Lewis, biting his lips, and trying hard to speak as calmly as he would to any ordinary patient, "from twelve to twenty-four hours. You are not frightened, my sweet May? You are *sure*—are you not?—that you will but pass from this world into a fairer one, where I shall follow you before very long?"

"Perhaps, dear Lewis."

"It is not *perhaps*, my darling, it is certain. I will pray God night and day to make it so. And no other woman shall ever fill your place, May. Oh, my love! my only love! no other woman *could*!

"But I shall not meet you if I am not worthy! Lewis, you must grant me a favor. I want to see——"

"Your mother and father, of course! I will send for them at once, darling. They have been here two and three times a day all through your illness, although you did not know them when they spoke to you."

He is going towards the bell, when she feebly beckons him back again.

"Not them," she gasps, "but the Vicar, Mr. Crosbie."

"*Mr. Crosbie!*" reiterates Lewis in astonishment.

"Yes! I must speak to him. He will give me hope and rest, perhaps. He will pray for me. I cannot die till I have seen Mr. Crosbie."

With a heavy heart, Lewis pens a note to the Vicar, requesting him to come and see his dying wife at once. He cannot quite understand May's earnest desire to receive ghostly counsel (as it is termed) at Mr. Crosbie's hands. It is the last thing he would have cared for himself under similar circumstances. But it *is* her desire. That is enough for him, and he will not baulk her slightest wish whilst it is in his power to gratify it. Just as he has finished the note, Anna re-enters the room, with a hot-water bottle to put to the clay-cold feet, and a strong stimulant in the shape of brandy and beef-tea.

"Are you sending to the Manor House?" she inquires, as she perceives her brother's occupation.

"No, to the Vicarage. May wishes to see Mr. Crosbie."

"You have told her then?"

"She *made* me, and I suppose it is best she should know. God help us all. Get some of that down her throat if you can. I will run and dispatch this note and a messenger to the Manor House, and will be back in a minute. Oh, my angel, how few minutes are left to our love now!"

He hurries from the room, and the news that the young doctor's wife is dying is soon spread over Withyslea. The Vicar is the first to answer the summons. He looks exceedingly grave as Lewis's note is handed him, and passes it over to his Charlotte without comment.

"Young Mrs. Vangel sinking—not expected to live many hours—how very shocking," exclaims Mrs. Crosbie. "But, Andrew, you cannot go to her. It is most unreasonable of them to ask you. Why, you know, she has confluent small-pox. It is exposing yourself to all the dangers of infection, and not only yourself, but me and your innocent children."

The Reverend Andrew purses up his red lips with evident indecision.

"Well, my dear, it is a very awkward predicament to be placed in. I feel for the poor young people from the bottom of my heart. That sweet, bright girl, stricken down like this, and that poor young man to be left a widower. It is very, *very* sad. Mary Moriaty *dying*. Shocking—shocking, almost incredible."

"Yes, of course, every one must agree in that," snaps his better half; "but the question is, whether you have any right to risk your life and the lives of all who belong to you by visiting a person in such a condition?"

"My dear, what will people say if I refuse to go to her? *I*—a minister of the Church—ordained to comfort and absolve the dying. The poor child may have something to say to me which she can confide to no one else. It is imperative that I should obey this summons."

"What a pity the messenger gave the note into your own hands. I might have said that you were out."

"Charlotte, Charlotte!" he cries, with mild reproof.

"It's all very well for you, perhaps, Andrew, but I'm thinking of my poor children. You must send a suit down to the harness room, and change your clothes there when you return. I won't let you enter the house until you have done so."

"I am willing to do anything you think right, my love, but I think I had better go at once. This note is very imperative. Ah, poor girl, poor girl. A month ago she wore the brightest and prettiest face in Withyslea," ex-

claims the Vicar, as he sets forth timidly on his ministerial duty. He is rather reassured when Lewis meets him at the door.

"Don't be afraid of the infection," he whispers sadly.

"The room has been thoroughly fumigated, and the risk is not so great at this stage as earlier. But she will not rest until she has seen you."

"Is it really hopeless, Doctor Vangel?"

"Don't ask me," cries Lewis, in a broken voice; "we have done all we can, but it has been useless."

"It is God's will, my dear young friend. You must look at it in that light."

"There is no light for me anywhere—just at present," replies Lewis, as he turns away.

Anna Vangel meets Mr. Crosbie at the head of the stairs.

"May has rallied a little for the moment," she says, "but she wishes to speak to you alone, so I will not go in again. Make the interview as brief as you can, Mr. Crosbie, for there is no time to spare."

"I suppose that you and her husband will wish to take the Holy Communion with her, Miss Vangel?"

"I don't know about my brother, but *I* will," replies Anna, "and you will find me here when you require me."

Mr. Crosbie enters the sick room on tip-toe, carrying the sacred elements, carefully before him. It is now six o'clock in the evening. The April twilight has fallen like darkness on the shaded room, and a pair of wax candles are burning on a side table, where they cannot hurt the patient's failing eyes. Mr. Crosbie deposits his morocco case upon the table, and creeps round the side of the bed. The sight that meets him shocks him beyond measure. He expected to see May Vangel with a swollen and *figured* face, but this death-like, distorted countenance, *covered with livid, crusted blotches, this head shorn of*

its lovely golden hair, these shadowy, shaking hands, and this hoarse and hollow voice that tries to greet him, he thinks he has never looked on anything so pitiable before. He has to stamp down his horror, and tell himself that this is Mary Moriaty before he can answer her greeting as he would wish to do.

"Mary, my dear girl," he commences, "it grieves me terribly to meet you like this, but you are in God's hands, my dear, and I hope you recognize His right to do with you as He thinks fit?"

"I know that I am dying," replies the feeble voice; "Lewis has told me so. I have not many hours to live, and I must tell you something before I go. I want to confess, Mr. Crosbie. I want to hear you absolve me from my sins, that I may die in peace."

"Certainly, my dear child. It is a very proper wish on your part, and I am ready to comply with it. Have you thought over your past sins?"

"No, no, I have had no time. I must tell you the worst. Are we alone?"

"Quite alone; the door is closed."

"My husband is not there behind the curtains?"

"No one is here except you and me."

"He must not know it," says May; "don't let his dear heart be wounded more, he is so good and true."

Mr. Crosbie (who has been murmuring some words in Latin over her) replies,—

"Have no fear, Mary, what you may tell me is under the sacred seal of confession; no one shall hear it but myself, and now I am ready."

The scarlet life-blood has no longer the power to dye her brow and cheeks with burning shame, but even now her poor head droops under the pain of confessing her degradation.

"Before I married my husband," she commences, in broken sentences, "I loved—another man, and—he—
—betrayed me."

"What!" exclaims the Vicar, with unorthodox surprise, but he is really so astonished that the word is wrung from him against his will.

"He—betrayed me," repeats the dying girl; "you understand—don't make me explain. I have never told anybody before, not my mother, nor father, nor—nor—my husband."

"You let him marry you in ignorance, May? That was very wrong," says the Vicar.

"But I have repented," she cries, with sudden energy, clasping her attenuated hands; "oh, Mr. Crosbie, I have repented every moment since. I was so young; I believed we should be married; I did not realize what I was doing; but oh, the agony since—the daily, hourly agony. My love for Lewis, my remorse, my anguish, it is that which has killed me. I have had no hope—no hope."

"But it has come to you now, Mary. By the very effort these words have cost you, hope has become yours. Thank God with all the strength you have left that He has given you courage to confess your sin, and I will pronounce over you the absolution for the dying, for this and every other sin you may have committed."

He breathes the words of absolution over her, whilst May lies in a half ecstatic state upon her pillow, with her eyes raised to Heaven.

"Are you *sure* it is forgiven now," she says, as his voice ceases, "and that it need never trouble me more?"

"I am sure that the guilt of every sin you have ever fallen into is wiped away forever, and that you are pure and white in the Father's eyes, and fit to enter His presence; and now I will administer the Holy Communion to you."

He goes to the door and softly calls to Anna Vangel, *who enters* with her mother.

"Where is my Lewis?" demands May.

"He will come to you afterwards, dear," replies her sister-in-law.

"No! now—now."

Lewis comes up to the bedside silently, and falls beside it as in prayer.

"Oh, my love, my love," he utters, with a groan, "I did not think that I was worthy."

"No more am I, darling husband; but hold my hand and give me strength."

So they receive the sacred mysteries together, and only an occasional sob from one or other of the communicants breaks upon the solemn tones of the Vicar's voice.

"Now I am ready," says May, when he has finished, "and I am content; Lewis, you will not leave me?"

"Never again, my darling; I will not stir from your side."

"Nor dear sister Anna, who has been so good to me; I want you both."

"Farewell, dear May," says Mr. Crosbie, taking her hand, "and may God bless you."

"Good-bye, Mr. Crosbie, I am so happy now that I can die in peace, all forgiven—all forgiven."

The Vicar quits the room with tears upon his round, red face, and they all accompany him.

All, that is, but Lewis Vangel, who sits beside the bed, holding his wife's pulse in his hand. Presently her eyes close wearily, and her lips part. He starts up in alarm. Has the end come already? No, her pulse tells him she is not failing yet, and her breath is being drawn, feebly but regularly. Actually she sleeps. He is glad to think that she may pass away so quietly, and with such a resigned and peaceful look upon her poor scarred face. Anna enters the room to share his vigil, and they sit there for hours, not daring to disturb May's last moments by a word. Mr. and Mrs. Moriarty creep in at intervals to stand at the foot of the bed with the tears running

down their cheeks, as they gaze upon their dying child. But May does not stir nor speak; to all appearance she might be already dead. About midnight, Lewis whispers to his sister,—

“Have a stimulant ready in case she regains her consciousness. She may have a few last words to say to us. Anything with brandy in it will do. It’s little enough my poor darling will ever need between her lips again.”

He resumes his vigil with a look of hopeless despair upon his face. Some one comes for him about that time and asks him to go and attend a midwifery case.

“I will not go. Tell them to send to Leaton or Todhampton,” he says impatiently—about the only time Anna has ever heard him impatient over his duties—“I suppose I *ought* to leave her,” he says, in a weary tone; “God knows I can do her no good, but I *cannot* part with her for these few last moments. And, after all, she is my patient as well as my wife,” he adds pitifully.

As the night passes into dawn, May opens her eyes again, and looks in a dazed and wondering way about her. Lewis is on the alert immediately.

“The stimulant!” he says hurriedly.

He cannot bear that she should pass away without another word of love to him. Anna brings it at once, and deftly tilts the spoon upon the sick girl’s lips. May swallows one teaspoonful of arrowroot and brandy, then a second—and, with a sigh, closes her eyes once more.

“Lewis,” says Anna, with a significant glance, “she has fallen asleep again.”

“Don’t look at me like that,” he answers. “There is no hope; but I thank God she is so quiet and free from pain.”

But nurses are sometimes better judges than doctors, and, as the morning breaks, Anna feels justified in communicating her ideas to the household, though she warns *them* that the rally is too slight to prognosticate recovery

from. However, little by little, the ray of hope widens and widens, until sunshine pours back again on all their hearts. Lewis Vangel cannot realize at first that the danger has passed. He has believed in it so long that he has grown accustomed to its shadow, and thinks it must return. But when May's first recuperative sleep is followed by another and another, until she seems to sleep all day, and her teaspoonful of arrowroot changes into basins of beef-tea, which disappear in their turn in favor of boiled chicken and seakale—then he *does* dare to believe that his darling girl is restored to him, and his happiness and gratitude know no bounds.

Mr. and Mrs. Moriaty (though very thankful for their daughter's recovery) cannot conceal their chagrin and disappointment at the loss of her good looks. Her mother seldom leaves her presence without a burst of tears over this bitter ending for her petted child. But Lewis appears to think nothing of the fact that May's lovely face is marred almost beyond recognition. For, though both he and Anna, by their skilful nursing, have provided against any permanent disfiguration, it is a long time before his wife's features regain their normal shape, or her complexion its transparent coloring. In some degree, indeed, she must endure the loss of her youthful charms forever; but Lewis remembers nothing, except that she has been given back to him from the very jaws of death, and has no regrets to waste upon her vanished beauty. And neither does May seem to care much about it. They keep it from her (as is usual on such occasions) as long as they possibly can, but the day comes when young Mrs. Vangel is able to leave her room and walk about the house, and then it becomes necessary to break the truth (which she has naturally suspected) to her. She sheds a few tears when she first sees her altered face in the looking-glass; but Lewis's assurance of his increased love for her, and Anna's more *practical* consolation that in a few months the disfigure-

ment will be scarcely observable, soon dry them again, and before long May is ready, with the elasticity of youth, to make fun of her own ugliness. Once on her feet and able to take drives in her mother's close carriage, the girl soon regains sufficient strength to go to the seaside and complete her convalescence. Lewis would dearly like to accompany her and nurse her back to perfect health, but (as usual) his hands are full of work, and so he confides his darling to the care of Anna and her parents, who arrange to form her bodyguard to Eastbourne. It is lovely spring weather when they leave Withyslea. The trees and flowers are bursting into bloom, the birds are making love, everything in Nature seems to breathe of hope and renovation.

"I am sorry to go without you, Lewis," says May, as he stands at the door of the railway carriage, holding her hand; "I should have enjoyed the change so much more if you had been with us, and I am afraid you will feel so lonely."

"Not a bit of it, my May. I shall always be thinking of my darling wife gaining health and strength by the sea waves, and looking forward to the time when you return to me. Only come back, my own sweet May, as you were of old, and I shall want nothing more."

"Ah, Lewis," she replies sadly, "you forget, darling. I shall never be that again. You have lost your pretty wife forever."

"Why, did you think I was alluding to your looks, dear, when I called you my own sweet May? Oh, no, I admired them—no man more—but they were the worst half of my wife to me. It is your heart you must bring back, dearest, faithful and true to me only, and your health, without which life can be no enjoyment to you, and then I shall be quite content."

"Oh, Lewis, if I could only repay your love!"

"You repay it by *existing*, May. If you only knew

the terrible weeks I passed while you were in danger, you would not wonder that I have no regret to waste over a little deterioration in your outward appearance. Think how much I have to be grateful for in comparison with others. Poor Rabbitts, with both his girls gone ; Longley, who has lost his wife ; and old Mrs. Benson her eldest son. *These* are justified in mourning if you like. Not *I*, to whom God has mercifully restored you. And now, good-bye, my darling. In another moment you will be off. Get well and strong, that is all that is needed to make me perfectly happy again." And with his loving eyes fixed on her to the last, and a cheerful wave of his hand as the train moves out of the station, Lewis Vangel turns back to his work with a silent thanksgiving in his heart.

But the departure of May for the seaside, with every prospect of coming back restored to health and strength, raises almost a spirit of dissatisfaction amongst her friends and neighbors. Withyslea feels it has been cheated out of a sensation. The idea of the young wife lying dying in a darkened chamber, faltering out her last messages of love to her distracted husband, was interesting and romantic—more, it was shocking and sensational. It afforded them no end of gossip. What the invalid said and what she did, how Lewis looked, and how he had broken down, how Anna had shaken her head, and what old Mrs. Vangel had repeated of the danger, and the doses, and the second doctor from Todhampton—all this was very engrossing, and formed a topic for discussion and conjecture over many a tea-table. Had the excitement been followed by death, and a coffin, covered with flowers, and a grand funeral, all the parish would have attended it, sniffing behind their handkerchiefs. But, as May has been contradictory enough to recover, and go off to Eastbourne, why, they sniff instead of sniffing, and begin to *think that a great deal too much fuss was made about her*

illness, and that it was all a mistake on Doctor Vangel's part, and probably his wife had never been in any danger at all. Withyslea thinks it has been "*taken in*," and amongst the foremost who think so are Mrs. Crosbie and Miss Cassie Prew. The Vicar's wife has been rather puzzled by the demeanor of her husband ever since the evening he was summoned to attend the seeming death-bed of Mrs. Lewis Vangel. He came back from that interview silent, shocked, and impervious to all questioning. Her inquiries met with the briefest answers ; her curiosity was checked in the bud. All she could learn was, that the girl was evidently dying, and in the most terrible condition of disease—that she had confessed to him, and received the holy communion, and that, he had left her calm and resigned. But nothing further would the Reverend Andrew reveal, though Mrs. Crosbie felt sure that there was more to tell. Her husband's unusual perturbation and melancholy, his reluctance to allude to the subject, and an occasional remark he would inadvertently drop, all convinced her that something very unexpected, at least to himself, had transpired.

"Dear, dear," he would exclaim, "what a world this is ! How little we know people ! Those who appear the purest and most innocent on the surface may be leading a life of the grossest immorality."

"To whom are you alluding, love ?" his wife would meekly inquire.

"To no one, my dear, to no one. I was only thinking aloud in my foolish way," the Vicar would reply.

But Mrs. Crosby did not believe him. When it was announced that May had taken a turn for the better, he suddenly exclaimed,—

"I am glad—*very* glad—to hear it. It is a terrible thing for a young person to be cut off in the midst of sin *with no time for self-examination, or repentance, or reparation.*"

"Why, Andrew, are you alluding to May Vangel? I thought she was one of your 'immaculates,' and had never done anything to repent of."

The Vicar reddened, but held his ground.

"Did I say she *had*, my dear? But no one of us is 'immaculate,' and I must chide you for using such an expression. We all (even a young creature like May Vangel) have sinned and come short of the glory."

"Oh, *that*, of course," returned Charlotte, tossing her head, "but I thought it was something far more personal from the way in which you spoke of it."

"And in effect, my dear," she said afterwards to Miss Prew, when mentioning the circumstance, "I am sure it *is*. I shall never forget the Vicar's looks on the evening he returned from hearing her confession. '*Scared*' is the only name for them. What that girl can have told him beats me altogether. But I always said she was sly, and you may depend upon it she has done something that took the Vicar completely by surprise."

"Dear me, and he has never told *you* what it was?"

"Oh, no, my dear. Under the seal of confession, you know, he is bound not to repeat it."

"But to *you*. It would be as safe as though he breathed it to himself."

"Of course. Well, perhaps I may be able to get it out of him by degrees, but at present he is adamant. However, she shocked him terribly. I have no doubt whatever of that."

And the next time Miss Prew stepped in to see her other cronies, she prepared them for whatever might be coming, by the announcement that she had had it from Mrs. Crosbie's own lips that Mrs. Lewis Vangel confessed something so shocking to the Vicar, when she believed herself to be dying, that he turned quite faint, and was not himself for days afterwards.

Meanwhile, Mary cheats their love of horrors by leav-

ing Withyslea, and Doctor Vangel delightedly spreads the news that the sea air is doing wonders for her, and she is almost herself again.

"Fancy!" he exclaims, with a beaming face, to the Vicar, as he meets him in the parish one day in June, "my mother-in-law writes me word that my wife is so much better they have let my sister return to London. May can walk three or four miles a day now, and is growing quite fat and rosy again. I hope to get away for a fortnight shortly, and join them. Mr. Ford, of Leaton, has offered to let his assistant take my work, and I hope to bring my dear girl back to Withyslea quite well and strong again."

The Vicar congratulates him on the good news, and returns home to repeat it to his wife, but he looks strangely grave and perplexed.

"Andrew, what is the matter with you?" demands Mrs. Crosbie, when they are alone together, "you look so solemn, you quite affect my spirits. If you have anything to say to me, I wish you would say it and have done with it."

It is observable that the dear, good woman is always, more or less, on tenterhooks if she notices anything like a disturbance in her husband's spirits, though *why* she should have anything to fear in her pure and simple life it would be hard to say.

"To say to *you*, my Charlotte?" returns the Reverend Andrew. "What *should* I have, except it be to call down a blessing on your head, and thank Heaven I have such a wife as few men possess? No, no! I have nothing to say to *you*."

"Then why are you so grave?"

"I was thinking, my love. I am troubled in **my** mind, and am not sure in which path my duty lies."

"Cannot I help you?"

"My helpmeet, you could indeed, if I dared confide in **you**. But the secret is not mine. It is another's."

"How does it affect you, then?"

"My love, cannot you understand the difficulty of a divided duty? Suppose you were made the depositary of a secret, under peculiar circumstances, and were bound to keep it. The circumstances change. What seemed right in the first instance seems wrong in that. What should you do?"

Mrs. Crosbie thinks a little before she asks,—

"Will keeping the secret hurt yourself? Will divulging it benefit another?"

"Always clear-headed and perspicuous," he says admiringly. "No, and yes. No harm can accrue to me in either case, but I think a great injury may be done to others if the secret is kept inviolate. It concerns those who *ought* to know it, who should have known it long ago, who may be deceived again if not put on their guard."

"I have guessed the source from which this secret came to you," says his wife confidently. "May Vangel told it you when she thought she was dying, and Doctor Vangel is the man whom you believe it is your duty to undeceive."

The weak-minded Vicar looks at his clear-headed wife with fatuous admiration.

"My love," he replies, "your quickness startles me. You guess things by intuition. You are a perfect witch. But, remember, this is purely your own imagination. I never told you."

Charlotte rises and plants herself playfully on her husband's knee. (Even Vicars and their wives indulge in these conjugal pleasantries at times, and I have already said that the flesh-pots and garlic of Egypt are a weakness of the Reverend Andrew.)

"You dear soul," she exclaims, with one arm round his neck, and her lips pressed upon his broad expanse of cheek, "you are the essence of truth and honor. You

would never tell a creature outside your own circle. But am *I* an outsider? Am I not part of you? Are we not *one*, in body and soul and mind, and is it then so wonderful that I can read every thought of yours? Besides, dearest, you cannot tell me anything that I do not already know. Mary Vangel made no secret of her follies to her friends. Girls seldom do. If they don't repeat them just as they occurred, they leak out by degrees. They are too full of them to keep them to themselves. I know all about poor May's trouble, but I daresay it was a great comfort to her to confess it to you, and receive absolution. I only hope she'll keep up the good habit on her return home. And now, you want my advice whether you should tell Doctor Vangel of it or not?"

The Reverend Andrew is completely gulled.

"And so you have already heard it?" he exclaims, with a deep-drawn breath of relief. "It eases my mind immensely, Charlotte, for otherwise I could never have confided it to you, nor taken your advice on the subject. What a shocking thing, isn't it, that so young and innocent-looking a girl should fall—that one so carefully brought up and tended should become the prey of an unprincipled man? Poor May! And you have known it all this time, yet never shrunk from her, nor avoided her society. Charlotte, I must rescind my own words, and say you are an immaculate woman. 'Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.' I do not believe there is another in your position that would behave as you do."

And it is sincerely to be hoped, if the Vicar only knew it, that there is not.

Charlotte accepts her praises very modestly.

"Well, dearest," she says, after a pause, "and can I help you?"

"Yes. Since you know all, there is no reason I should *not* ask for your advice. Poor May confided the sad story of her seduction to me when we all believed she was

dying, and it was not the moment to urge her to repair her fault by telling her husband. Now that she has recovered, however, and is likely to have a long life, is it right he should be kept in the dark? Is it right to let her live a lie? May not the temptation recur—even be thrown in her way—by continued concealment! What is my duty? This is the thought that puzzles and disturbs me."

Mrs. Crosbie's pale eyes shine with ill-concealed pleasure. She remembers Lewis Vangel's midnight visit to the Vicarage, and the shadows on the blind, and would dearly love to see his pride crushed to the very ground. But can she afford it? Might not his downfall, should her husband be the instrument of it, include her own? This is a ticklish question, and it takes her some time to decide it.

"Let me put on my little considering cap," she says, with infantine simplicity. She clasps her hand before her eyes, and appears lost in thought for a minute. Then she replies deliberately,—

"You are right, my dear, doubtless,—you always are,—but don't be in a hurry. Let us temper judgment with mercy. The young woman is not yet convalescent. Precipitation might throw her back. Wait for a few weeks till we see how matters progress, and then let us consult together again."

"Admirable woman! We will."

"Meanwhile, my dear husband, you must not be surprised if this rumor should reach you from other quarters. I have already told you that you are not the only person who knows it, and May Vangel's illness has set her acquaintances talking again. But I will do my utmost to stop it. So sad! So terribly sad! But what can you expect of a poor girl brought up (as it were) between Roman Catholicism and Nonconformity?"

"I did not expect to find you so much on her side, my dear. Your leniency and generosity take me by surprise."

"But a fellow-woman, dear Andrew—a sister, as you may say."

"A sister who has enjoyed the privilege of your example, my Charlotte, and yet has not profited by it. That is the astonishing part of it to me. Ah, my poor May! She has indeed sinned against light and knowledge!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FIRE KINDLES.

THAT very evening Miss Cassie Prew is standing at the open window of her little cottage, looking discontentedly up and down the dusty road. Miss Prew might be as happy as other people if she were not always longing for some thing more than she has. Her cottage is the model of a rural abode. Roses and honeysuckle and clematis climb all over it. The garden, back and front, is stocked with perennials and good old-fashioned plants, that blossom without giving anybody any trouble, year after year, and fill the air with their fragrance. Indoors, she has five or six comfortably-furnished rooms, and a little maid to look after them; and if Cassie could only employ herself and be happy, like a reasonable woman, over her work, and her books, and her housekeeping, she might pass a very enviable existence. But Cassie can't. She neglects the needlework, and tosses aside the books, while she stands at the window sighing after the lover who never comes to fill up the measure of her days. She falls into such depths of despair, sometimes, as to question within herself whether a romantic marriage with someone much beneath her in station would not be better than no marriage at all. She has heard of a certain lady of title in London who married a German baker, and serves behind his counter in a brown holland apron, and

she casts sheep's eyes occasionally at Lewis Vangel's man, who is a good-looking young fellow with curly dark hair, or at her own gardener, who has the most beautiful pair of china-blue eyes, and wonders what the Withyslea people would say if she were to intimate to either of them that a proposal of marriage would be taken into consideration.

Doctor Vangel's unexpected defalcation was a great blow, and she hates both him and his wife for the disappointment they inadvertently caused her, and still more because she has found it impossible to get on terms of intimacy at Wotton House. Lewis cannot abide her. He says she sets his teeth on edge like sour apples, and May has been quite ready to back his opinion, so that Miss Prew bears no love, at the present moment, to either of them. As she turns her head on this particular evening, however, her eye brightens. Mrs. Crosbie has just turned out of the Vicarage gates, and is evidently making her way towards Vine Cottage. In a moment Cassie calls sharply to her little handmaiden to put the kettle on and prepare tea, whilst she gets out her best service from a painted cupboard by the side of the fireplace. She has just finished dusting the china with her pocket handkerchief when Mrs. Crosbie passes through the wicket gate.

"Oh, my dear friend," cries Cassie enthusiastically, as they meet, "I hoped—I trusted—you were going to take pity on me. This is indeed good of you. You know how I value one of our cozy chats, with no fear of interruption."

"Exactly, my dear. That is just why I am here, instead of asking you to visit me at the Vicarage to-night. The poor Vicar has a sudden attack of faceache. He caught cold, I fancy, driving out so late last evening, and cannot leave the drawing-room, so we could not have been alone. And I do so love to be alone sometimes *with my dear Cassie.*"

"Oh, you darling," cries Miss Prew, kissing her.

"It is true. And the Vicar has been rather trying to-day. Men do not bear pain very patiently. But I have so much to tell you, I couldn't wait till to-morrow."

"Is it about the young person we were speaking of lately?" inquires Miss Prew enigmatically, in deference to the presence of the handmaiden who is laying the tea.

"Exactly. I have heard *such* things. Oh, my dear," cries the Vicar's wife, with uplifted hands.

"You make me curious," replies Miss Prew. "Hannah," she continues to her servant, "go down to Mrs. Jones and ask her to let me have six new-laid eggs. Take the basket and bring them back yourself. Now, be off at once. *That* will keep her away for a good hour. And now, my dearest friend, we shall have the house to ourselves."

"That is just as I like it, Cassie. Common people are so vulgarly inquisitive, you never know when they may have their eyes or ears to the keyhole."

"Just my own opinion. But now, dear Mrs. Crosbie, we are absolutely safe."

"Well, my dear, I know *everything*! The Vicar has made a clean breast to me."

"Never!"

"It all came out so naturally, it would have made you laugh. He began by asking my advice in a suppositious case, and I guessed at once it was May Vangel's. So I told him I knew all about it already, and he need have no scruple in speaking out before me, and he fell into the trap at once. Men are very simple, upon my word."

"Oh, you clever thing. There are few of them could outwit *you*," cries Miss Prew, in an ecstasy of delight.

"But, my dear, if I give you a hint of what he told me, you must promise never to mention my name in connection with it. It would be ruination, you know, both to *the Vicar* and myself."

"Oh, never, *never*. But *do* tell me!"

"Not for the world. I won't *tell* anything. I daren't. But I will relate you a story I once heard, and you can apply the moral as you think fit. You know that dreadful girl, Ruth Williams, whom they employ as housemaid at Wotton House?"

"Yes. What of her?"

"Why, everybody in Withyslea knows *what of her*. The surprise was when young Mrs. Vangel took her into her service. An abandoned girl, who should have been made a public example, driven from every respectable house, starved, pointed at, *whipped* (if the laws of England were only what they should be), engaged at good wages, and lodged in every comfort, treated, in fact, like anybody else. I considered it an insult to the entire community. Didn't you?"

"Of course I did, if *you* did," murmurs the jackal.

"No one guessed the reason at the time, though I had my suspicions, and now my suspicions are confirmed. 'Birds of a feather flock together.'"

"Oh, my dearest Mrs. Crosbie you never mean——"

"Indeed I *do* mean, Miss Prew, and emphatically so. I mean that the mistress is no better than the maid, and that, if Ruth Williams is not fit for the kitchen, neither is Mary Moriarty for the drawing-room."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! You take away my breath."

"And Doctor Vangel holding his head so high, too. That is what irritates *me*," continues the pure-souled Charlotte. "Nothing is good enough for *his* wife, forsooth. He talks of her as if she were the queen of England, and the purest saint in the Calendar. Faugh! it sickens me. I don't care about *her* more than about any other girl in the world, but I should like to see *his* pride taken down."

"*Shall you tell him?*" demands Miss Prew in an awe-struck whisper, for she thinks the Vicar's wife looks dangerous.

"Certainly not. It is not my business. Andrew thinks *he* ought to do so, but I have dissuaded him from the idea. He heard it in confession, and he will get in a scrape with his bishop if he is known to divulge it. Neither of us can meddle openly. But I think you and I could manage it between us."

"Oh, *how*, dear friend? Make any use of me you can."

"Well, not with daggers or bowls of poison, Cassie, so don't look so romantic, but just in our own little way. The least hint will do. You have only to whisper it to one of the Taylors or Robertsons, to send it all over the parish in a couple of days."

"But suppose it is brought home to me? Isn't it libellous? I imagine Doctor Vangel could be very terrible if he were offended."

"You silly girl, you mustn't repeat it openly, and never before a second witness. One is of no use in a court of law. Besides, you can always deny you said it, and your word is as good as another's."

"I *hope* so. I trust I am too well known in Withyslea, where my dear papa was respected far and wide, to have my word doubted by any one."

"Just so."

"And Mr. Crosbie heard it in confession? There can be no doubt of it, then. It is very terrible. But, my dearest friend, *who was it?*" inquires the old maid, with round, curious eyes.

Her dearest friend shakes her head.

"I mustn't tell you *that*. No, no."

"You *know*, then?"

"I can guess. And now, you naughty girl, not another word. But try and help me in this little dilemma. The Vicar says it will prevent more mischief if Doctor Vangel's eyes are opened to his wife's antecedents. And *I don't think you need mind about his feelings, Cassie.*

He didn't behave particularly well to you in the days gone by."

Miss Prew instantly becomes pensive. Her long brown curls droop forward across her cheeks. Her eyelids droop, and her mouth turns downward at the corners.

"No, indeed. There *was* a time, dear friend, when I believed——"

"Yes, yes; I know," consolingly, "and had every right to believe into the bargain. But you are well out of it, Cassie. I could never have been that man's friend as well as yours."

"And my choice must be *your* choice too," responds Miss Prew, clasping Mrs. Crosbie's hand, and speaking as fervently as though she were eighteen, and "all the world before her where to choose."

The upshot of this charitable conversation is that the news of poor May's downfall is known all over Withyslea in a very short time. Little by little—caused by a word here and a word there—it creeps from ear to ear, and from mouth to mouth, till the farmers' wives discuss it with one another, and the girls whisper and giggle over it as they go to the milk sheds, or into the haymaking fields.

Lewis is the last to hear of it. Are not the ones most interested in a crime or a misfortune always the last to be informed of what their neighbors are discussing? His face has been becoming brighter and brighter as the time approaches for his joining May at Eastbourne, and now the very day has arrived, and he is making his last round of visits in company with Mr. Ashford, who has come over from Leaton to supply his place during his absence. The village can show a clean bill of health by this time, and the two young men are laughing heartily together over some story as they walk back to Wotton House together. In doing so they pass James Thrupp's cottage, and the old man appears upon his threshold.

"*Mornin', doctor,*" he says. "*Be you a-goin' away, sir?*"

"Yes, Thrupp, by the three o'clock train. I'm off for a little holiday."

"And not before you deserves it, sir. But can I have a word with you before you go?"

"Certainly, if you won't keep me long. Nothing the matter, is there?"

"No, sir, not with me. But I'd like to see you alone."

"Very good. Ashford, will you walk on without me? I'll catch you up in a minute or two. Now, Thrupp, what can I do for you?"

"You can't do nothing for *me*, sir. It's *summat* for *you* as I wants to do. There's a deal o' tattle a-goin' about Withyslea, sir."

Lewis laughs.

"Well, that's no news, Thrupp. They've been at it ever since *I* knew them. Is it anything particular?"

"It's *summat* very *serious*, doctor, at least in my eyes, because it concerns that sweet young lady, whom I never can forget, nor be ungrateful to, as held my poor Ellen's dying head on her bussum."

"*My wife!*" exclaims Lewis, wrinkling his brows. "What do they dare to say of her!"

"Now doan't ee get too angry, sir. I don't believe a word of it, nor doan't a' many others, but scandal is like disease, it creeps in at the cracks o' the doors."

"Well, what is this lying scandal?"

"No one would have heard a word on't if it hadn't been for that Miss Prew," continues Thrupp. "She don't think it, but I've traced it back to her, and I've those as will swear to it. You see, sir, when my grand-daughter Nell—my son's eldest gal—came in here with the story, I boxed her ears straight off, and sent her back howling to her father, but arterwards I thought I was misjudged. 'Twasn't *the gal's* fault so much as theirs as told it her. So I traced *it* back from Nell to Susan Adams, and from Susan to old *Mrs. Brewer*, and from *Mrs. Brewer* to *Mrs. Lewson* (that's

the mother of the gal as lives with Miss Prew), and from her on to the old cat herself. And she's at the bottom of it all, sir, and you ought to know it."

Lewis has grown very white during this harangue, and when it is concluded he says,—

"But I have not yet heard what the scandal is, Thrupp."

"Well, I can't repeat it to you, sir. It would blister my tongue. I love and I admire your young lady. I think she has the sweetest face and the feelingest 'art in all Withyslea, and I don't believe no bad of 'er, and I never will. But aperiently there's them as do, and they quotes the Reverend Mr. Crosbie as their authority, though how *he* could 'ave 'eerd anything, or repeated it, beats me. Still, I don't like them half-hearted, humbugging parsons as ain't English nor yet Roman, and I don't believe in their confessionals nor their candles."

Lewis starts. The word "confessionals" recalls that awful afternoon when his May lay dying, as he fully thought, and would not rest till he had summoned Mr. Crosbie.

"I would rather you told me all you know," he says.

"I *can't*, sir. I wouldn't insult you nor that sweet creature by sayin' such words. But you see Miss Prew; stop her tongue, sir, afore you leaves Withyslea, or the place will be too hot to hold you when you comes back again."

"I will, Thrupp, and thank you."

"And bring back your bonny lady well and strong to us again, sir, for she's the jewel of Withyslea, and there's no one else like her in all the village."

Lewis catches the old man's hand, and presses it firmly. An awful doubt has taken possession of his soul, and the praises of May sound sweeter than ever in his ears.

"Thrupp," he exclaims, "you are a true friend, and I *shall not forget it*. You may depend that, if I can make

the calumniators of my dear wife suffer for their malice, I will. Meanwhile, maintain your trust in her, for she is worthy of it, and don't be afraid that she will ever have cause to hang her head before those who are not fit to loose her shoe-strings. Good-bye. I shall not leave Withyslea now until this matter is settled."

He speaks boldly, as he feels, but his heart is very sore. He is like a knight buckling on his armor. The bugle call has sounded, and he is ready to fight, but he regrets that there should be any necessity for doing so. As he strides away from Thrupp's cottage, and thinks over the communication he has received, May would scarcely have known him. She has never seen him look like this. His brow is knitted, his blue eyes are dark as a thunder-cloud, and his hand clenches and unclenches itself as it hangs loosely at his side. His naturally hot temper (which he has learned so ably to control) is up in arms at the idea of a pack of tattling, scandalizing women running down an unfortunate girl's character in order to satisfy their own love of gossip. But what have they said? Where can they have heard it? What did May confess to Mr. Crosbie when she believed herself to be at the point of death, and how can that confession have leaked out, and been repeated? These are the questions Lewis is determined to have answered. He has never liked nor believed in the Vicar of Withyslea, but he cannot think so badly of him as to suppose he would tamper with the sacred ordinances of his office. Some woman must surely be at the bottom of the scandal, and he has no reason to suppose Thrupp is mistaken in fixing it upon Miss Prew. With Lewis Vangel to make up his mind concerning a thing is to do it, and he loses no time about this. He only looks in at his own house to dispatch his groom to Leaton with a telegram for Eastbourne to say his coming *is postponed* to the next day, before he walks across to *Miss Prew's cottage*.

As she sees him enter the front garden, some intuition of his errand makes her heart sink. He has never called on her since his marriage, and there is an expression on his face which causes her to tremble like an aspen leaf. As he enters the room she tries to be jocose, in order to conceal her agitation.

"Doctor Vangel! Why, you are quite a stranger! What brings you over to my humble cot to-day?"

"A very serious matter, Miss Prew," he replies uncompromisingly, "and one which concerns you nearly."

"Dear me," she says flutteringly, "I have not the slightest notion what you can mean. Won't you take a chair, and may I offer you some refreshment?"

"No chair, thank you, and no refreshment. I prefer standing. There are certain rumors going about Withyslea, Miss Prew, which have come to my ears, and which have been traced back to you. They concern the reputation of my wife, and I have come for an explanation."

Cassie Prew turns perfectly white.

"I have never said anything," she avers; "I don't know to what you allude."

"Yes, you do! Your face is more candid than your lips. Be careful how you answer me, Miss Prew. I have witnesses ready to confront you with."

Then she turns on him like a trapped badger.

"I don't believe it. This is most ungentlemanly—most unmanly of you—to attack an unprotected lady in this manner. I tell you I have said nothing about your wife, and, if I did, it was perfectly true."

"Indeed! and how *dared* you say anything at all? What do you know of my wife's private affairs? She has held herself aloof enough from you."

"Oh, as to *that*," exclaims Miss Prew, tossing her virginal head. "I should not dream of associating myself with *her*! My papa was always most particular in

choosing my acquaintances, and I have made a point of keeping up the practice since he left me."

"Now, look here, Miss Prew," says Lewis, in his sternest voice, "it is of no use your attempting to beat about the bush with me. When I say that I intend to 'scotch' this venomous slander in the birth, I mean it. My wife's home is in Withyslea, and I don't intend to let her home be turned into a hell by women's evil tongues. I know that you have spoken against her, and made others do the same, and I don't leave this house till you give me your authority for doing so. What have you said, and who made you say it? That is what I will know."

"I have said nothing but what Mrs. Lewis Vangel said herself. She is the only authority I had."

"When did she say it? And what is this terrible thing that she has said?"

"Oh, you'd better ask her that *yourself*, Doctor Vangel," exclaims Cassie Prew, laughing affectedly; "Mrs. Vangel will, doubtless, recall the details better than I can."

Lewis strides up to her and seizes her by the wrist.

"Woman!" he cries, "how *dare* you laugh? Here have you been trifling with the character of my wife—tampering with the happiness of my home—and you stand here and laugh as if it were a capital jest. By heavens, you shall answer to me for it, if I have you up in a court for libel. Now, do you understand that I am in earnest?"

He looks terrible in his wrath, and Cassie is fairly frightened. Like all scandalmongers, she is a great coward when brought face to face with the mischief she has done, and ready to lay the blame on any other's shoulder. Her face becomes livid as Lewis places his hand upon her, and she reads the determination in his eyes.

"But it was not *I*," she gasps. "I assure you, Doctor Vangel, that it was not. Your wife confessed it to the Vicar. She told him— Oh, what have I said? Now you

will get me into a scrape at the Vicarage, but I never repeated a word but what I heard from Mrs. Crosbie's own lips."

"Very good," replies Lewis, with clenched teeth, "very good. Then you will go with me to the Vicarage, and repeat before Mr. and Mrs. Crosbie what you have told me here."

"No!" screamed Miss Prew; "I cannot, I will not."

"You can, and you will. Remember, I have determined to search this matter to the bottom, and if you refuse to go with me, I shall insist on their confronting you here."

"But, Doctor Vangel, you must promise me not to say that I mentioned Mrs. Crosbie's name. It was an error, a foolish mistake. I remember now it was quite another person, and I can't think how I ever came to speak of Mrs. Crosbie."

"Mrs. Crosbie and I will settle that between us, Miss Prew. Your business is only to accompany me. But, for Heaven's sake, don't make this matter worse by more falsehoods. Be true (if you can), and let me see my way plain before me. The Vicarage luncheon bell has just sounded. We shall find them at home. Come at once."

And, as if she were under a spell, though weeping bitterly, Miss Cassie puts her garden hat upon her head, and follows the doctor meekly through the Vicarage gates.

They find the Reverend Andrew and his wife (as they anticipated) sitting down to luncheon.

"I regret to disturb you, Mr. Crosbie," commences Lewis Vangel curtly, "but I have business with you and Mrs. Crosbie that will not wait. Will you give me a few minutes where we shall be alone?"

The Vicar and his wife, astonished at the appearance of the weeping Cassie, who looks like a thief being taken in tow by a policeman, follow the young doctor with some curiosity to the drawing-room.

"Why, my dear Cassie, what is this?" exclaims Mrs. Crosbie, as the door closes upon them. Cassie's answer is conveyed by casting herself into her Charlotte's arms.

"Oh, my dear, dear friend, I am utterly blameless; believe me that Doctor Vangel is completely wrong."

"I can quite understand *that*," replies Mrs. Crosbie witheringly; "the puzzle is why you two should arrive here together."

"It will not be a puzzle to you long, madam," says Lewis, in his loftiest tones, "and we have come to you for the solution. There is a scandal abroad in Withyslea connected with my wife's name. It has been traced back to Miss Prew, and Miss Prew declares she had it from *your* lips, and that it is the sum total of what my wife told to your husband when she supposed herself to be dying."

"Did Miss Prew say *that*?" exclaims Mrs. Crosbie.

"Oh, no; oh, no," gasps the miserable Cassie.

"Don't lie," cries Lewis, more emphatically than courteously; but this is not a moment when he can stop to choose his words. "You told me so not ten minutes ago in your own house."

Miss Prew gives a fell shriek, as Mrs. Crosbie hurls her from the shelter of her bosom on to an adjoining couch.

"Viper, serpent," she hisses; "and this is the end of your professed devotion for me, but our friendship is over, from this day and forever."

"Supposing you leave Miss Prew alone, and defend yourself, madam. A secret told under the seal of confession has leaked out through your means. What have you to say to it? What has your husband to say to it? What will the Bishop of the diocese say to it, if I choose to lay a complaint before him? Answer me that, Mr. Crosbie! This is a matter which concerns you more than it does your wife."

The Reverend Andrew has turned purple with conflicting emotions. He looks at his wife, and exclaims,

“Charlotte, is it *possible*?”

“Certainly not,” she snaps back, like a vicious cur; “the whole story is concocted by the doctor and that vile, false creature, Cassie Prew.”

“It is *not* an invention, Mr. Crosbie,” exclaims Lewis fiercely. “It is a fact that when my darling wife had, as we all believed, but a few hours to live, she confided to you a secret burden that had troubled her young life, and you have betrayed her trust. What excuse have you to make for yourself? What reason to adduce why you should not be stripped of a privilege which you have so shamefully abused?”

“Really, Doctor Vangel, you have taken me so much by surprise, I have had no time to collect my thoughts. I *did* receive your wife’s confession, certainly, but there was nothing in it that all the world might not have heard, and if a contrary report has been circulated in Withyslea, it is not with my knowledge, and I have nothing to do with it.”

“Are you ready to write that down and sign it, that I may use it, if needful, to confront these slanderers?”

“Oh, certainly! certainly!” replies the Reverend Andrew, whose legs, under the thought of the Bishop and the scandal, and perhaps a removal to a less congenial living, are trembling to such a degree that he can hardly find his way to a writing-table to indite the required document.

Lewis waits till he has it in his hand before he turns to Mrs. Crosbie.

“And now, madam,” he says, “that your husband has denied in writing all complicity in this disgraceful affair, I want to know how *you* presumed to risk his professional reputation in order to cover your own slander?”

“I refuse to speak to you,” replies the Vicar’s wife; “you have extorted my husband’s denial under protest. The whole affair is an insolent attempt to cover your wife’s want of character.”

"And what about your own?" says Lewis interrogatively. He has his eyes fixed on her face, and she blushes scarlet. In a moment there flashes across her mind the remembrance of his midnight visit to the Vicarage, and she feels she is in his power.

"What is it that you want me to do?" she asks irritably; "it appears to me that a great deal of unnecessary fuss is being made about this matter? What does it amount to after all? Cassie Prew has been gossiping in her usual way, and lays the blame on me. Well, I repudiate it! She must bear the brunt of her own shortcomings. I know nothing, and I have said nothing."

"You declare then, before your husband and your so-called friend, you know nothing against my wife's fair fame?"

"Nothing whatever."

"And you have said nothing?"

"I have said nothing."

"All the scandal, then, is due to other sources, and you will be ready to deny any knowledge of it at any time?"

"Certainly. I always discourage scandal, as most unbecoming a minister's wife."

"Then, armed with your personal denial and the Vicar's written testimony, I think I can defy Withyslea. But don't let it happen again," adds Lewis sternly, "for I hold my wife's honor as dearly as my own, and will fight for it to the bitter end."

"I suppose she will soon be coming back again to us?" says Charlotte, trying to end the interview pleasantly.

"I do not know; but it will make little difference, I fancy, to yourself, Mrs. Crosbie. I don't think that, after this, May will often trouble the Vicarage."

"Oh, indeed! Perhaps we are not good enough for her," cries the Vicar's wife, unable to resist a parting shot. Lewis regards her once more between the eyes. He is

sorely tempted to speak, but he is a true gentleman, and he spares her. He watches her glance droop uneasily before his own, and is satisfied. Though she hisses to the last like a dying reptile, she will not sting May again. He will hold a whip above her as long as she lives in Withyslea.

"Good-morning," he says abruptly, as he turns on his heel and leaves the room.

"Insolent young man!" exclaims Charlotte.

The Vicar is too humbled and too shocked to say anything.

Cassie Prew rises slowly from the sofa where Mrs. Crosbie flung her, and approaches her friend with an inflamed countenance and woe-begone expression.

"Mrs. Crosbie!" she ejaculates appealingly.

"Don't speak to me!" cries the pure-souled Charlotte sharply; "and never presume to enter my doors again. I have done with you forever, you false, hypocritical, backbiting creature!"

"But, Mrs. Crosbie, you *did* say so," pleads Cassie, with streaming eyes.

"Andrew," exclaims the Vicar's wife. "Do you intend me to be insulted any longer? First by the doctor, and now by this woman. I refuse to submit to it. Tell her to leave the house."

"Miss Prew, I think you had better go now. Another day, perhaps," says the Vicar.

And the weeping Cassie obeys him meekly, though convinced that that "other day" will never dawn for her, and the Vicarage doors (as far as she is concerned) are closed forever. Then the Reverend Andrew Crosbie and wife are left alone. A profound silence ensues. Charlotte doesn't quite like it. She approaches the Vicar and puts her arms about him.

"What a trial, love," she says. "Thank goodness it is over."

But the Vicar puts her determinately away.

"Charlotte," he says, in a severe voice, "*you did* repeat that story. You have betrayed my confidence. I know it."

"Well, and what if I did?" she replies, with affected indifference. "You said you thought it was a duty to let Doctor Vangel know. And it was only to Cassie Prew. The blame all lies at her door. Why did she go and gabble it all over the village? It's not *my* fault."

"Not *your* fault," he answers mournfully. "Not your fault that, in order to escape ecclesiastical censure, I have signed my name to a written lie, that you have almost sworn to the same, that the slander that has been spread broadcast may never be quite rooted up, that you have involved that poor old maid in the trouble, and that Lewis Vangel knows us for liars and scandalmongers? For I read it in his face. Oh, Charlotte, Charlotte, I have trusted in you. I never thought I should live to see this day."

"Why didn't you keep it to yourself, then?" she says rudely. "If you hadn't let it out first, no one could have repeated it."

"God forgive me. You are right. I am in reality the only one to blame," he replies, in a low voice, as he wipes off the tears that are coursing down his fat cheeks.

Presently they rise, and with some effort go into the luncheon-room together, and finish their interrupted meal. But the rupture in their married lives is never quite cemented again. The spell is broken. The Vicar has called her his "pure-souled Charlotte" for the last time.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FORGIVEN.

MAY VANGEL is sitting on the beach at Eastbourne, wrapt in her own thoughts. A carriage umbrella, well driven into the sand behind her, forms a shelter for her head, a novel and a basket of fruit are beside her; in the rear a cushion lies ready in case she should wish to lie down, and, at a little distance, is seated the maid, Saunders, to attend to her slightest need. But May is almost independent now of assistance. She reposes here during the best part of each day, because Lewis has enjoined Mrs. Moriarty to let her be as much as possible in the open air, but she is nearly well again. As she reclines on the sands in a white dress, with a broad-brimmed Leghorn hat shading her eyes, and her ungloved hands lying listlessly upon her lap, one would not observe so very great a difference in her from the May Vangel of a few months ago. Her fair hair, which was cut off during her illness, has grown into a thick, short crop of sunny curls, which becomes her perfectly. Her eyes are as deep and as bright as ever. On her smooth face, indeed, the cruel small-pox has placed its indelible finger here and there but it is only here and there. Her complexion is a little deadened, but her features are not changed, though their expression is far more serious. And May looks much older than she did. She has lost her youthful charm of sparkling vivacity, but it is questionable if she is not more interesting under the present aspect. Which of us has been so valuable as a companion and a friend in our giddy, foolish, inexperienced youth as when sorrow and trouble have made us able to

sympathize with those who suffer? May has the newest sensation from Mudie's in her hand, but she is not reading. Her large gray eyes are fixed immovably upon the sea. How the summer waves run and sparkle in the sunlight, creaming softly up the sands, and lapping the rosy, naked feet of the little children who are paddling in it.

How strange it seems to May Vangel to be there, alive and well, with none of her capabilities for enjoyment gone, instead of lying in the grave asleep for evermore, or wandering in an unknown æther incapable of communicating with those she had left behind her. How awful it seems to the young to die—that is, when death is at a distance. How little they can realize an experience which makes us look forward to the grave as to a resting-place. May is full of solemn thoughts, and has been so ever since the power was given back to her to think. A resolution is growing in her mind to do a duty, which she feels she was given back to life to perform, and which becomes more palpable each day. What the upshot of it may be she cannot tell. Perhaps a lifelong disgrace and exile, but her conscience says that, whatever the consequences, it *must* be done—that she will know no peace nor rest until it *is* done. And yet the very thought of doing it makes her tremble.

As she is pondering over a possible future, her mother comes up to her side, and deposits herself there. Mrs. Moriarty is more than usually tender over her daughter in these days. She sees that she is suffering, and she guesses the reason, and does all in her power to divert her mind from dwelling on it.

"May, my darling," she commences, when she has recovered her breath a little from the exertion of ploughing through the sand, "papa sent me down to ask if you will walk or drive this afternoon, and I am to send Saunders back with the answer. Lewis cannot be here till six or seven o'clock, and papa has found a beautiful little open

carriage for hire that will hold us all nicely. What do you say?"

"I would rather remain at home, and wait for Lewis, mother. He *might* arrive earlier, and I am hungering to see him. Besides——"

"Besides *what*, my darling?"

"Send Saunders back with your answer, mother. I want to speak to you alone."

"Well, you can make up your mind afterwards, my love. Saunders, take back the cushion and the plaid, and tell your master he can secure the carriage if he likes to do so."

"Very good, ma'am."

"And now," says Mrs. Moriatty, when the waiting-woman is out of hearing, "what have you to say to me May?"

"Mother, I have been thinking very deeply lately, and I have come to the determination to tell my husband *everything*."

Mrs. Moriatty looks concerned.

"My darling, will that be wise?"

"I don't know if it will be *wise*," replies May wearily, "in a worldly point of view. I don't know even where it will end, what he will say to it, or if he will ever consent to look at me again. But I feel that it *must be*. That I cannot live a life of deceit any longer—that his loving looks and caresses will kill me, unless I know that he bestows them upon May Vangel as she *is*, not as he *believes* her to be."

"My dearest child, I hardly know how to answer you or to advise you. Your father and I have passed a very happy married life, without reservations or concealments of any kind. But then we have had nothing to conceal, and I don't know how it would have been if he had suddenly found out that I had kept anything back from him. You and Lewis are quite happy as it is, my dear. I don't like

to urge you to do anything against your conscience, but I *do* think it would be a pity to risk disturbing your domestic peace. Lewis loves you dearly, but some men are very unforgiving when they find there is anything to forgive, and my counsel would be to hold your tongue."

"I cannot take your counsel, mother, and for the very reason you put forward, because Lewis loves me so. It is his devoted, faithful love that has brought me on my knees to him. How can I go on deceiving a man whom I worship? Mother, you don't know what he has been to me. Always kind—always considerate—always tender. All through my illness, often when they thought I was both blind and deaf, I have been conscious of his deep enduring love, and my unworthiness of it. Oh, mother, if I could wipe out the miserable past with tears of blood, how gladly would I shed every drop I have in my body."

"Oh, May, my child, don't speak of it. I thought, when I first discovered the truth, that it would kill me too. My lamb, my precious lamb, that I should never have trusted from my side. But it was not *your* fault, my darling, half so much as that of the blackhearted scoundrel who took advantage of your inexperience."

"It was my fault, dear mother, that I let Lewis marry me in ignorance of my past. I did not think then how much injury it involved to him. I imagined all men were much alike, that they cared only for our faces, and so long as they knew nothing, they would be content. But he has taught me of such a higher, holier love than that, of such an union of souls without a cloud between them, of such a mutual reverence (notwithstanding faults and follies, so long as we are sorry for them), that I cannot be content with less than the standard he has raised before me. Mother, whatever the results, I mean to keep my word. I would rather live apart from my husband, and keep his respect, than be his wife and feel myself unworthy of the position."

"But, my dearest, supposing he repudiates you for it? Lewis is very kind, but he can be very stern. What will you do then?"

May burst into tears.

"Won't you take me back, mother? Will you, too, turn against your poor, unhappy child?"

"Oh, my darling, *never!* But we shall have to find some excuse for your papa, who has not heard a word about the matter."

"In such a case we shall have to tell papa the truth too. Oh, mother no more lies, not even for my sake! I have been rescued from the very jaws of death. I cannot go back to the old frivolous mind and feelings now."

"May, you surprise me! You are talking like an old woman of fifty instead of a girl of——"

"I think I *am* older, mother, in every way. My sickness seems to have taken me down into the very depths to teach me wisdom. And Anna Vangel is so good, too. She has taught me so much. I never seem to have known my own husband thoroughly till I saw him through her eyes."

"You are very fond of our dear Lewis, May?"

Her fingers clasp themselves together nervously.

"*Fond*, mother! Fond is no name for what I feel for him. I love, and esteem, and reverence him from the very bottom of my soul! If I were only *fond* of him, I might be content to let things continue as they are. But I cannot—I cannot—I cannot! We must be one—one in heart, and mind, and spirit—or we must be nothing. And I am content to risk my future happiness upon the issue."

"Well, my dearest," replies Mrs. Moriaty, rising, "you must do just as you think fit, and I only hope our dear Lewis will appreciate your motives as much as I do. Are you coming back to luncheon, love?"

"No, mother! I want none. I have my fruit. Send Saunders down at three o'clock to carry back the umbrella, and I will wait my husband's arrival in the house."

"May, shall you tell him at *once*?" whispers Mrs. Moriatty.

"At once! immediately!" she exclaims feverishly, "I will not let an hour pass without learning my fate. For the suspense would kill me—*kill me*."

And so her mother leaves her, gazing in that far-seeing manner on the horizon, as if she expected to read her husband's decision in the wide expanse of ocean.

Meanwhile, Lewis Vangel, having passed a very restless night, is speeding as fast as steam will take him towards Eastbourne. It is not to be supposed that the ordeal to which he has been subjected has not greatly disturbed him, for his own sake as well as that of his wife.

To think that May's name should be handled irreverently by the very boors on her father's domain is trying enough to her husband, but to think that May should have done anything to excite such irreverence is a thousand times worse. Lewis is a proud man as well as a passionate man. I have attempted to portray the struggle it cost him to accept the hand of Mary Moriatty when he thought her heart did not go with it. But, at all events, that struggle was known to himself alone. *This* one the world shares with him, and watches to see how he will bear it. That is the thing that has robbed Lewis Vangel of his sleep. But he never dreams of telling Mary of it. She is his wife, his very own possession. He will guard her as long as possible from the consequences even of her own indiscretion, as he has vowed to guard her throughout life. His ideas of the duties of a husband are illimitable. So, as he speeds to Eastbourne, he tries to shake off all unpleasant memories. His darling is only on the road to recovery yet. He will not mar her progress by one gloomy look or unchecked sigh. So, when he rushes tumultuously into May's presence two hours before she expected him, he looks as joyous and as loving as ever.

May is alone, Her parents have gone out driving, and

she is lying down on a couch in her own room, when her husband bursts in at the door, and, falling on his knees beside her, covers her with kisses. She clings to him for a moment in rapture, then draws herself away, pale and agitated. What right has she to accept his loving embraces ?

"Why, May, my darling," exclaims Lewis, holding both her hands to his lips, "how well you look ! You had not half prepared me for such a joyful surprise. Positively you are as sweet as ever, sweeter, if possible in your husband's eyes."

May sits up on the sofa, and timidly draws her hands away.

"What is it sweetheart ? Are you not glad to see me ? I have been counting the hours till we should meet. Ah ! my May, you little know what that terrible illness of yours has done for me. It opened my eyes as they were never opened before."

"And mine too, dear Lewis," replies May trembling.

"Ah, darling, I have upset you by my rough entrance ; you are not quite so strong as you imagine ; lie down again, and let me sit by you and hold your hand."

"Not till I have spoken to you, dear Lewis," cries May, alarmed at finding all her courage running out at her finger-ends. "You must let me speak at once, or I may never be able to do so. Oh, darling, darling husband, if you only knew how I have wept and prayed that God would give me strength to be bold and true as you are, that, even whilst you despise me, you may know that it is your bright example that has made me hate myself."

"Dear, darling May, what is this ?" exclaims Lewis, as she throws herself in a kneeling position at his feet.

"Don't raise me ; let me stay here. Think I am a little child kneeling to say my prayers to you—my prayers that you may not utterly condemn me."

And thereupon, in a faltering voice, broken by her sobs,

and with her face hidden against her husband's breast, Mary Vangel tells her story from the first word to the last, and waits to hear his verdict.

"When I thought I was dying, Lewis, I confessed it all to Mr. Crosbie, and he told me it was blotted out in God's eyes, and that I need never trouble myself about it any more. But since I have recovered I cannot be at rest. It is *you*, darling, against whom I have sinned. It is *you* to whom I should have come for forgiveness. It is *you* alone who must now say what punishment the future has in store for me."

"My brave girl," says Lewis, as he presses his lips upon her fair head, "my brave, true-hearted girl. May, I knew all this long ago. I knew it before you became my wife."

"And you *married* me!" she exclaims, raising her eyes, with a bewildered expression in them, to his.

"*I loved you!*" he replies, "and love, May, owes a duty to itself as well as to the beloved. *I loved you*, and I married you, and I have never repented it one moment since. What, sweet wife, have *I* no sins of my hot-headed youth to look back upon and mourn, and shall I presume to constitute myself your judge? No, let me be your confident—your friend—your lover till death parts us, but never expect me to reproach you for a past in which I had no share. Oh, May, dearer than ever for the courage and truth you have displayed to-day, come to my heart and let your future home be there."

She raises her head with a quick, short cry of happiness, and is folded in her husband's arms.

CHORUS OF FEMALE READERS.

"Oh, dear, what an unsatisfactory ending. Why didn't *she* make the Vicar find out all about Charlotte and the long-legged curate, and what became of Miss Prew; and

did Lewis Vangel ever tell his wife of the slanders that were circulated concerning her, and how did they get on when they returned to Withyslea, and was Anna always a nurse, and Lewis always a doctor? And why didn't the Vicar and his wife and all the disagreeable people die, and Lewis and May come in for a big fortune, and why aren't we told what became of the O'Mores?

"Why—why—oh, why?"

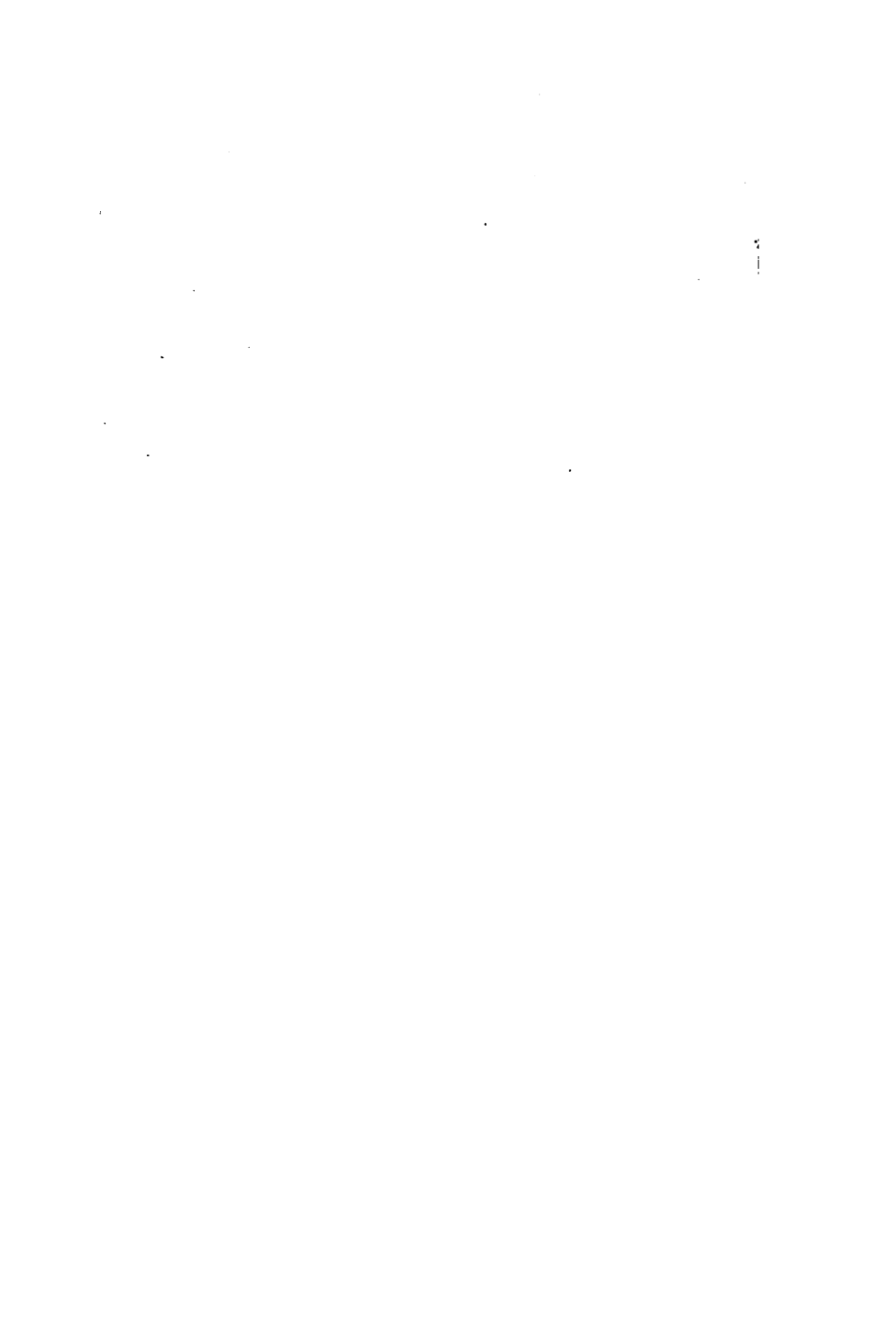
My dear friends, I will tell you why; because this story is a true one, and in nature we do not find poetic justice meted out according to our deserts. Can you say it has been so with yourselves; have *you* not done many wrong things during your lifetime that have never been found out or punished? Have *you* not heard (aye, and repeated) slanders that have never reached the ears of those whom they concerned? Don't *you* know disagreeable people who live on, notwithstanding the ardent wishes of their acquaintances to the contrary, and nice people who are compelled to drudge all their lives at occupations uncongenial to them? If such things *have* been, such things *will* be, and Lewis and May Vangel, in returning to Withyslea, where matters have been made rather unpleasant for them, are not in a worse plight than many others. And they have a panacea against petty worries which few of us possess—true love and hope and confidence, and a judgment tempered with mercy.

But there is one postscript which I may add with due effect. The Bishop of the diocese ordered that confessional to be pulled down again before many months were over Withyslea, and the Reverend Andrew was so disheartened by the humiliating rebuff, that, on the very first opportunity, he moved himself and all his belongings to a parish the tastes of which were more congenial to his own.

THE END.

7-11-2
HM





the 1990s, the number of people with a mental health problem has increased by 50% (Mental Health Foundation 1999).

There is a growing awareness of the need to address the needs of people with mental health problems, and the importance of providing them with appropriate services. This has led to a number of initiatives, including the development of mental health services, the establishment of mental health trusts, and the implementation of mental health legislation. The aim of this paper is to review the current state of mental health services in the UK, and to discuss the challenges facing them in the future.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we discuss the current state of mental health services in the UK. Second, we discuss the challenges facing mental health services in the future. Third, we discuss the implications of these challenges for the development of mental health services.

The current state of mental health services in the UK is characterized by a number of key features. First, there is a growing awareness of the need to address the needs of people with mental health problems. This has led to a number of initiatives, including the development of mental health services, the establishment of mental health trusts, and the implementation of mental health legislation.

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The challenges facing mental health services in the future are a number of key features. First, there is a growing awareness of the need to address the needs of people with mental health problems. This has led to a number of initiatives, including the development of mental health services, the establishment of mental health trusts, and the implementation of mental health legislation.

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